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THE WOMAN'S LAW

BY

MARAVENE THOMPSON

WITH EIGHT ILLUSTRATIONS BY

W. D. GOLDBECK

NEW YORK

FREDERICK A. STOKES COMPANY

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"'Give me a day of your life. One day!'" . *Frontispiece*

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THE WOMAN'S LAW

I

HUSBAND and wife sat in a long silence after his recital. The man's face was ghastly with fright. By degrees the woman's stunned gaze changed to one of questioning.

"Why did you—kill him?"

"Why?" repeated George Orcutt.

"Was it—in self-defense?" There was an imploring cadence in quaver.

"No," he groaned. "We were both in ugly temper—I was playing with the knife—I didn't intend —Then—somehow it was done—and—he was—at my feet, the knife in—his—heart. It is there now —my knife with my name on the handle."

Her shivering hands came to her eyes as though to shut out the thing he told her was "there."

"And Earle and Adams knew we went to the studio together," continued the man despairingly. "Charlie Knox passed me as I was coming out of Emmet's door—I was so undone that I almost blurted it out to him—I used my latch-key for fear

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I should tell it to the footman—It was too—awful —to keep alone——"

The wife gazed into his terrified eyes, and into the glaze of her own crept a strange light. She leaned forward, her parched voice threaded with a note of hope.

"And no one saw you as you came through the halls—no one of the maids?"

"No one."

Half rising, she stared at something ahead of her, then stumbled to the door and turned the key. She caught him by the arm.

"Take your hat and coat and cane and get behind that tapestry."

The tapestry in question was of exquisite workmanship and fabulous value—a shepherd leaning upon his staff, gamboling lambs, a boy playing upon a flute, the dimensions full five feet by seven. It hung against a surface flat to outward appearance; but behind it was a recess that had once held a life-size statue.

George Orcutt drew in a breath as of new life.

"What a head you have! I believe you can save me."

"I shall try—to save my baby—from—the disgrace of your—arrest," returned his wife, maternal tenderness flooding her breaking voice. "You quarreled over—a woman?"

"It was a woman." George Orcutt's gaze was dully wondering. The incomprehensibility of it

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would never leave him. That he could kill his friends for so slight a cause—a pair of faithless red lips and a provocative smile!

"There will be room for a chair," she went on, a little wildly. "I will arrange it so that you can get enough air. And keep very quiet and don't come out—Oh! don't get afraid and come out—not till *I* tell you—It is only a hope—yet—But stay there quietly till—I know——"

The tapestry again in place with him seated behind it, Gail Orcutt unlocked the door and threw it open. Then she went to a window and opened it and stood still, drinking in the cold air. The past seven years spread before her. To-day was the seventh anniversary of their marriage. She had been seventeen then, an ardent girl, believing the man she loved so chivalrous a creature that worship was not more than his due. Acolyte had never believed more in his patron saint than she in George Orcutt when she married him. Her belief in him had lasted six months. Then she had learned that he was faithless to her. He was a lover of women, not of one woman.

More, this wife of seventeen had learned that her own father knew! He had smiled when she came to him with her tears and hot anger and heart-break, had smiled patronizingly as he had years before when she cried over a broken doll! A shattered plaything, an unfaithful husband—did she not know that these were mere incidents in her

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life? Of course, a china toy would break; of course George Orcutt would be untrue to her. But why cry his unfaithfulness aloud to the world? This was a thing to hide, not to bruit abroad.

And she had hid it. She had crept back home, an outraged child, heart-broken over her shattered idol. But she could do no more than play the part of wife. The arrangement had been consented to by George Orcutt readily enough. He was proud to have this beautiful girl wear his name. He liked scandal no better than did his father-in-law. His amours were clandestine. It was only by chance that his wife had discovered his inconstancy. For which he was at first sorry, and later, glad. Sorry, because in his way he loved her; and glad, for the reason that he had nothing further to fear. Outside of perfunctory courtesies toward his family his life was henceforth his own. Till to-day he had not entered his wife's rooms for seven years less the six months' honeymoon.

That honeymoon had become more hideous to Gail to contemplate than the later years' pretensions. Her most poignant suffering had been caused by the knowledge that she had ever loved the man whose name she bore. There was a sense of outrage against herself that she could ever have been attracted by one so wholly unworthy.

And George Orcutt was now a—murderer. She was the wife of a murderer. And Vance—her beautiful boy! Her chivalrous, high-minded little

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son! The being to whom she pinned all her hope and faith and love!—What would it mean to Vance to be branded as a murderer's son? Her hands clenched more tightly. The boy was peculiarly sensitive. He would carry the burden of his father's guilt as fully as though it were his own. As boy and man he would be under the shadow of this awful thing that had happened to-day. It did not matter what Vance himself was or what he should become. He was irrevocably George Orcutt's son —George Orcutt, murderer!

And *she* had given Vance his father. Somehow, *somehow,* she should have divined the ignominy of George Orcutt's soul and saved herself and her boy from him. She had been blind—a child—unthinking, unquestioning; yes—but even so——

Her head came up—like a mother doe's at bay; purpose, purpose indomitable, mingled with the glazed agony of her eyes.

Last week at dinner she had sat beside Judge Allison in his home and heard him denounce the police in biting tones. He had said that 80 per cent. of all the murderers went uncaught and that less than 2 per cent. got punished. And he had said something else. *He had told her how to save George Orcutt.* George Orcutt was not then a murderer; Frederick Allison was not then acting in the capacity of judge. He was a host entertaining a beautiful woman—a woman seemingly as far removed from the sordid crime of to-day as noon

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from midnight. The Orcutt name was one of the oldest and most dignified in New York. George Orcutt's great-grandfather had raised and supported a regiment in the Revolutionary army; his father, a major-general of the Civil War, had been prouder of his title and his maimed leg than of his millions. It was by a grant of land from King George II. to the first American Orcutt that the foundation for the Orcutt millions had been laid.

Gail had told Judge Allison of Vance, her boy; not tales of his childish prattle and cleverness, but revelations of his character; and she had told of these with a pathetic questioning in her eyes—her being unconsciously pleading for assurance that her son was destined to become a good man.

And the Judge had smiled on her tenderly—on the *mother*. For she was now primarily not woman, nor wife, his experienced mind apprehended, but a creature who had borne a son, and who would always and forever bear him upon her heart.

It was the *mother* who stood now by the window and laid her plan—the plan that was to swing her like a pendulum between heaven and hell.

As a woman Gail Orcutt would not have had the strength nor the cunning either to conceive this plan or to carry it into effect. As George Orcutt's unloved wife she would not have had the inspiration. But as strength and endurance had come to meet the physical travail that gave her baby life, it came

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now to save the boy and the man he was to be from the devastating shadow of the electric chair.

She did not realize the terrific odds against her in a conflict with the law; she had no knowledge of the long arm with which it encircles the globe. It was a menace that threatened her offspring, and she pitted her puny strength against it with the instinct of a mother sparrow against a hawk. She was blind to everything but her motherhood. She was Protector, Defender, Love, for him—her child!

She turned from the window. She had spent nine minutes in laying her plan. For another minute she stood motionless and gathered her resources together—her courage, her pride, her woman's cunning, her society poise, her mask of coldness under which she had hidden the burning misery of these six and a half years.

"Insight—Wit—Nerve!" These were the three winning cards in the game of crime, had been Judge Allison's pronouncement. Insight to divine the road the pursuer would take; wit to extricate oneself when cornered; nerve to play the game through to the end—making no admissions, conceding no points, proclaiming innocence in the face of an army of accusers. Insight, wit, nerve—she would have these—because *she must have them!* And one other card was hers. She was a woman and beautiful. There had been times when she had loathed the beauty that had won George Orcutt's fancy; times when she had hated her dependency as a

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woman. Now—*Now!* She whispered the word in scared breath. Her hands came up to her throat in a clutch of agony. Now!—the word held but one significance—the awful present and the weird thing that she must carry through.

She went to the call-bell, pressed the button to summon her maid. The girl appeared, trim, smiling.

"Tell Bryan to have the car here in fifteen minutes," said Gail, and said it carelessly to her own amazement. Then quietly, with no haste, she waited while Sylvie enveloped her in the long sable coat, set her hat at just the right angle, patted a loose lock into place, fastened her gloves, pinned a fragrant rose at her waist, handed her the pillowy muff.

"Zat is all," said Sylvie, surveying her work carefully. *"Non,* one thing more, madame. Ze cheeks want a little color, a vair little." Sylvie said this coaxingly, for she and "madame" did not always agree as to the necessity of rouge.

But to-day, to the delight of Sylvie's French artistry, madame was complacent. Nor did she dissent when the "vair little" became considerable. Sylvie was radiant.

"Now madame is *transcendente,"* she cried. "It is ze color zat gives ze *vivacité, ouil"*

Gail smiled, with her lips, and the long lashes hid the terror that leapt to her eyes as she went out and left Sylvie in the room—the room with the tapestry.

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II

DRIVE very slowly, and near the curbing," was Gail's order to the chauffeur. "And keep to the thoroughfares, where the sidewalks are crowded with people. Keep going till I signal you to stop."

The car moved forward. Down the Drive to Seventy-second Street, through the Park and on to Fifth Avenue; down the Avenue to Sixteenth Street; across to Broadway; up Broadway; thence on Forty-second Street to the Grand Central Terminal. The car turned, went back over the ground.

Gail's eyes, filled with desperate questioning, gazed out on the medley of faces. There was every face there but the kind she sought. *Yet Judge Allison had said that he could find his double in a search of three blocks—his double as regarded height, weight, shape of head, color of eyes and hair, his double in these and all of the characteristics that could be conveyed by a description.*

At the corner of Forty-second and Broadway the automobile came to a full stop, held up with a score of other vehicles by the white-gloved hand of an officer till the waiting pedestrians were escorted

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across the crowded thoroughfare. Gail, her eyes still filled with agonized questioning, gazed out on the passing faces. An instant's wild staring, then she opened the door and almost flung herself on the man standing on the curbing directly facing her. She pushed him within the limousine and sat down pantingly beside him. The chauffeur, eyes on the officer, ears deadened by the din of the jangling traffic, drove on, unaware of the scene so quickly enacted.

For a breathless moment Gail's eyes traversed the face of the man beside her. She took stock of his features; of his shoulders; his body. Then——

"You are a gentleman," she uttered rapidly. "And I am a woman in need, the greatest need. You can help me. I can't tell you why. But—Give me a day of your life. One day! On a hazard—without questions." She bent her face nearer to him, her alluring face whose power she knew. "I am asking you for a service that requires courage and faith in me. Will you go blindly into what may seem to you grave peril?—for the sake of an unknown child and—and—a mother? It is my motherhood that makes me brave enough to ask this —to beg you to give a day of your life to me to use for myself, in my own way. Will you?"

The man's eyes rested on her in a dazed, unblinking way. He knitted his brows. His lips opened, but he did not speak.

"Will you?" she repeated, tensely.

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His hand reached up and grasped his hat between wavering fingers. He laid it on his knee.

"Excuse me, dear," he stammered. "I forgot I was in the house. I——"

There was bewilderment in the eyes he fastened upon her. Again he knitted his brows. She saw that he did this in an effort to think—a vain effort. It was apparent that he did not understand her words. His lips parted, mumbled something, stayed parted in a vacant smile.

Gail looked at him again, closely.

It came to her comprehension that the vague unwinking orbs and the lax mouth bespoke a stunned brain.

She drew in her breath.

Here was a graver risk than the other. A gentleman might serve her through chivalry, or daring, or from desire for a new adventure, or for all reasons—or for no reason at all; and a gentleman's word once passed would remain inviolate. But the befogged brain beside her—was there any dependence in it? Was it passive or——

She did not complete the question. Her being, keyed to action, instinctively girded itself for the plunge.

She placed the man's hat on his head. "Keep it on," she urged, her voice coaxing, as to a child. The man smiled in a tired way, and let her envelop him in a fur-lined coat of George Orcutt's that she drew from beneath the seat. She brought the collar

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up over his necktie. A long scrutinizing look at her work, then she drew the stop-strap and waited.

The chauffeur's face betrayed surprise as he saw the other occupant.

"Mr. Orcutt got in when the car stopped a few blocks back," she explained, and listened in a daze at her own voice. "I received a telephone message that he was wandering about the streets alone and not—not well. I was looking for him." She stepped out. "He is—ill, out of his head somewhat. Stand close by the door and don't let him get out."

She swept by him and into the candy shop before which she had stopped the car.

The chauffeur smiled as he guarded the door. So Mr. Orcutt was "ill." And his wife thought she needed to tell him, Tom Bryan, who drove Orcutt home after his nights' debauches! That is, when he went home. Yet—it was unusual for him to be "ill" at this hour. And he did look strange, curiously unlike himself. Bryan's gaze, unconsciously questioning, turned on Mrs. Orcutt as she appeared.

The woman's tense muscles tightened a fraction more. It was here that the test was to come. Bryan saw that there was a difference between the George Orcutt of yesterday and the George Orcutt of today.

Her being sickened with fright. Judge Allison had said that the easiest way to deceive a fellow being was to lead him into deceiving himself; that a man involuntarily questions another's opinion and

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instinctively defends his own. Once having said that green is blue he would insist upon it, and swear to it, and eventually believe it.

Yet—to direct Bryan's attention to the difference he saw—Things reeled before her eyes—So much depended upon the successful carrying out of her plan—And how could she be sure——

Bryan's eyes still questioned.

"Mr. Orcutt looks very strange to me," she whispered. "I have never seen him look nor act so—peculiar. Is it anything unusual? Or have you known him to be—like this? I wonder if I had better have our physician see him."

Tom Bryan's open face could not fully hide his inward laughter. A physician?

"A few hours' sleep'll fix him. There's nothing to worry about, Mrs. Orcutt. Home?"

A smile bordering on hysteria came to Gail Orcutt's face as the car shot forward. Bryan had accepted this stranger for his employer! Bryan who had known Orcutt for five years!

Her drooping head rose—the proud head that not even George Orcutt's mad, foolish crime could lower. No! she breathed fiercely. No! She had set herself to find a way to save her baby. There was always a way, the judge had said, when one had a brain and eyes and ears.

Different, strange, unusual, bewildering, the looks of this man might be thought to be, but it would be George Orcutt who looked peculiar,

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George Orcutt, no other. This stranger thrown up at her from the curbing should be George Orcutt till the true Orcutt was safely out of the country. This was her plan. And somehow she should make it succeed. *Unless*—— But ah! the man must remain passive—*must!*

"Don't cry, dear."

Her eyes questioned his hopefully.

But vacancy again replaced his fleeting understanding, blankness suspended the compassion of his gaze. His eyes, bent on her face, seemed not to see her, not even as she drew him to his feet at the halting of the car.

Bryan, acting on the premise long since learned, that his employer always needed support when "ill," put an arm under the man's elbow and carefully guided him into the house. He moved without protest.

The mistress of the house followed—languidly, as though no shaking figure crouched behind a tapestry, no stark body lay grimly silent on a floor, a Chinese dirk piercing its heart. Yet Gail Orcutt's eyes held these two images. And another—the image of herself playing a weird part. And this was as unreal as the other two. Lucas Emmet was *not* dead—George Orcutt was *not* a murderer—She was *not* seeing a stranger go into her home on Bryan's arm.

An hour ago she had watched a ship go by, a six-masted schooner, sails outspread. She had

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thrilled æsthetically as it skimmed, like an eerie human thing, over the blue water. And she had thought of a sea-blue gown that she was to wear to the opera that night. *That* night? *This* night!

No! There was no reality in these images before her eyes. There was not—because there *could not be!* Yet——

"Take Mr. Orcutt to my room," she heard herself saying to Bryan. "I want to see how long one of these attacks lasts."

Bryan chuckled to himself over this new move of the madam's. He left George Orcutt in his wife's hands with the hope that he would get a little of what was legitimately coming to him. Not that he felt it would do him any good. But that was beside the point. A man who had a peach of a wife and didn't know how to treat her should at least be made to pay for his neglect by being hauled over the coals and made as uncomfortable as possible between whiles.

Gail waited till she could no longer hear Bryan's retreating footsteps, then she closed and locked the door, and staggered to a chair. Again a catching sob broke from her aching throat.

The man moved toward her, a comforting hand outstretched.

"Don't, dear, don't!" he entreated.

Shivering, she shrank away from him—a woman's instinctive shrinking from the touch of a stranger.

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But, as before, the man's interest was but transitory. His hand fell aimlessly to his side. He stood still in the strange room with only a dumb stare in his eyes, the unheeding stare of one who has no mental vision.

Gail left him where he stood, removed her wrap and hat, took a few moments to quell the beating of her overwrought heart. Then—in a low voice she called her husband.

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III

GEORGE ORCUTT'S bulging eyes leapt from the face of the man to the strained countenance of his wife.

"Am I out of my head? What does this mean, Gail? Good God! What does this mean?"

His wife did not answer. Her eyes travelled from man to man. Theirs was the same shaped face, the same full forehead and thick brown hair, the same golden-brown mustache and Vandyke beard, eyes of almost identical brownness. The noses were different, but not pronouncedly so; the contours of the cheeks were unlike, but only slightly; the ears were of different shapes—but who ever remembered an ear save it was deforming in its individuality? Till now she could not have told what shape her husband's were.

Both were of medium height and build, the possible inch's or pound's difference would not attract notice even from intimates. No; for Bryan's mobile boyish face had shown that nothing strange impressed him about the stature and weight of the man he helped from car to room. The dissimilari-

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ties were unimportant, the likeness striking. A Vandyke beard was so unusual a feature of a man's face of to-day that it alone would cause one man to be taken for the other in almost any crowd of ordinary acquaintances. And when this beard was golden-brown! Would even the most astute officer of the law look further with this before him in George Orcutt's home?

"Gail! Tell me!"

There was the agony of hope in Orcutt's frenzied voice.

"Wait."

Gail led the stranger into her boudoir, inaccessible except from the one entrance, and placed him in an easy chair. She waited till she saw his head sink back among the cushions and his eyes close in stupor, then she left him, closing the door between them.

"Now!" cried George Orcutt. He laid a feverish hand on her arm. "That man—have you bribed him to take my place till I'm on safe territory? But can you trust him? And——" Amazement spoke above all else—"where did you find another beard and forehead like mine? Did the devil fling up this man from the pavement?"

"Perhaps it was the devil—they say he looks out for his own," she returned in tired voice. "We have something to do now whether it is with or without the devil's aid. And you must obey me without questioning. First, you are to go in there

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"Would even the most astute officer before him in George

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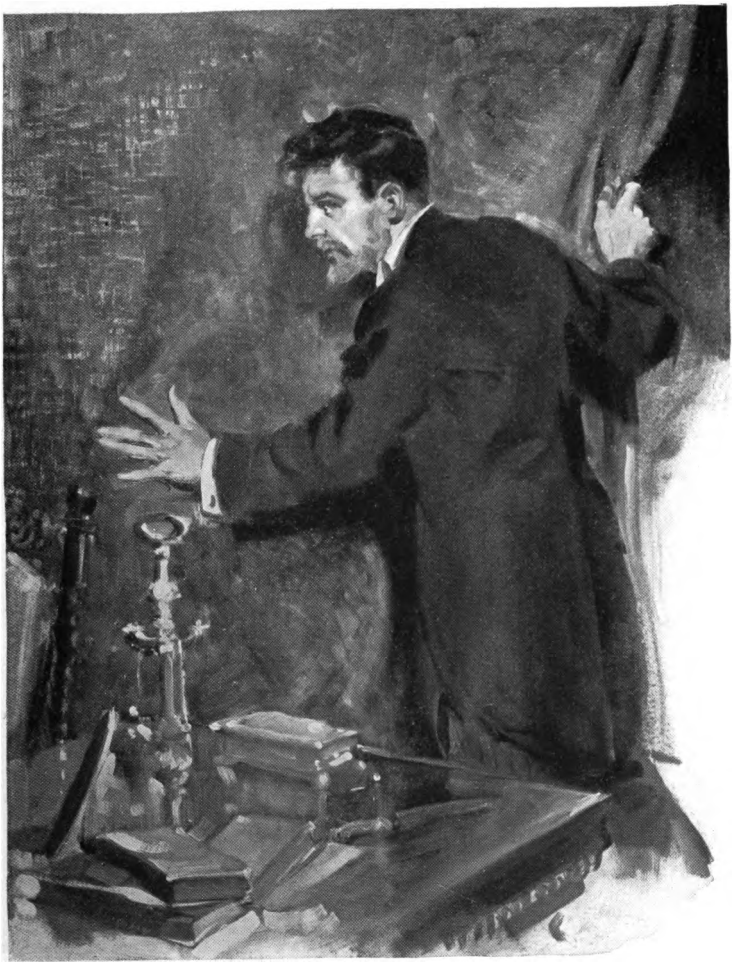

of the law look further with this Orcott's home?"—*Page 18*

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and strip that man and put the clothes on him that you are now wearing—every article. You will find a bath-robe of mine in the closet that you can put on yourself till I can bring you other clothes from your room. Wrap his clothes together so that you can take them with you behind the tapestry. When he is ready to do duty as George Orcutt, you and I can plan further. . . . He is out of his head, he will not resist you. . . . He is a gentleman—I am not buying him—Go! there is no need now for you to understand."

George Orcutt's wife sat with locked hands, almost motionless, till he returned.

A week ago she had told Judge Allison that a good woman could not commit a crime, that some force from within would keep her from it. And the judge had smiled—curiously. And he had asked her just what she meant by a "good woman." And he had told her that some of the greatest crimes were committed by women whose inner lives had always been pure. Love of country, love of husband, love of offspring—a good woman would lie and rob and slay for these idols of her heart. Gail had wondered vaguely to herself how a good woman—a woman who had always been honest, honorable, truthful, frank, could scheme and plot and intrigue. She wondered now how she herself could. She scorned lying and deceit. She had a passion for truth. In all her life she had never wantonly hurt any living creature. In her dealings with trades-

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people and servants she was deeply considerate. She had a yearning tenderness for all helpless things.

Yet——

There was a helpless stranger in the other room —a helpless stranger that *she* had brought here! And *she,* no other, was going to hold him from—mother?—wife?—child?—She did not know, and it did not matter. This was the horrifying part of it. She crouched low in her chair, tried to hide herself from her own accusing vision.

"A day, two days at the most, and he will be again with—the one he calls 'dear,' " she uttered in a childish whisper.

George Orcutt entered the room. His wife started a little at his appearance; the voluminous bath-robe draped about him was becomingly Grecian, and his face in his excitement had lost some of its pallor of dissipation. His dulled eyes were bright now, and his voice had recovered its resonance.

"I am saved," he announced. "George Orcutt is in there. A clean shave, a new name, hair parted differently, my pivot teeth removed, will be the only disguise I need to leave the country. How long can you keep him doped?"

She did not explain.

"You're a witch," he continued. His head bowed dejectedly. "And I've lost you now forever —and my boy! If I had my life to live over again!"

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His wife looked at him wistfully.

"I wish I weren't such a rotter," he added, with feeling.

"I wish you weren't," she returned with low fervor. "Till to-day—I never fully lost hope that you might sometime do differently. I should have no pity for you. Yet—I have. I can never forget that you are Vance's father. And for his sake, your son's who loves you, try, *try,* with all your strength to keep enough control of yourself not to betray your secret. Lock your name, your past, every identifying link, within your heart and keep them there. I will find a way to provide you with an income. But you must wait always for my move. The unforgivable thing now would be for you to allow yourself to be taken."

George Orcutt shuddered.

"I've put my mind in hell. I'll try to keep my body out of prison."

"You must!" Her voice was passionate. "You owe that much to Vance." Her words ended in a dry sob. "Let us not talk any more just now. I need my strength. I must plan to get you away—and for a hundred details."

She walked to the window, stood immovable.

He took a step toward her.

"I wish you could be free of me in some way. Free to marry some one else. I've never thought about it before—if—if there should be some one you want, why——" He groaned remorsefully.

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"You don't owe me anything, remember. No matter what a man is himself he wants his wife straight—— Only there's a limit, and I've gone it. I have no claim—you—er—understand what I mean."

"I have lost my faith in love between man and woman," she answered dully. "To-day's murder is not the first that you have committed—and slaying my faith is not the lesser crime. After knowing you I never want to know another man intimately."

"You mustn't feel like that," he cried with sudden virtue. "There's Vance, our boy. You must bring him up——"

"Stop! There is something that it is now too late to give him—a decent father. When I look at my innocent baby, at his dear open face, his honest eyes, his precious smile, I feel that surely, surely, *surely,* he will be a good man, honorable, faithful, a loyal husband and father. Then—I remember the look that is in your pictured face as a little boy, the same honesty and truth that——" She broke off, shivering. "Let us not talk about it! I shall love him as he is now, and try not to think about —what he—may—be——"

"But he must be kept from—from—oh! the things that make a man go to the devil!" he commanded.

Gail smiled drearily.

"Does a mother ever know what those things are? I shall do all I can—now. Nor can I blame

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myself for not giving him a good father—I thought the man I married was good—— My boy and I were both cheated——"

She turned abruptly, her bearing suddenly calm.

"They are coming up the walk now—an officer and another man. The tapestry!"

Her eyes swept the room to see that nothing suspicious lay about, then she went swiftly and looked at the man reposing in her boudoir. He still half reclined in the be-pillowed chair she had arranged, his eyes partly closed in stupor. As she bent over him to see that all was as it should be, his eyes took on a gleam of intelligence.

"My—own—girl——" he mumbled.

"Gail," she pronounced slowly. "Gail. Say it. Gail!"

His brows came together pathetically. She saw that it was useless to try to impress her name on his fleeting consciousness.

And just then there came a knock at the door.

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IV

THE killing of Lucas Emmet by George Orcutt was front page news next day. Each newspaper reported the crime according to its particular custom. Among them all no detail was knowingly allowed to escape publicity. There were pictures in numerous poses of the murderer and his victim, pictures of the woman in the case, pictures of the room where the murder took place, pictures of the men's homes, their clubs, their relatives and servants. But the thing most featured was the knife found in the dead man's heart. The imaginations of the reportorial staffs created a background for the present crime with tales of other crimes encompassed by the use of this ancient Chinese dirk—lurid, ghastly, blood-congealing in their horror. It lifted the commonplace killing of man by man into a realm of mystery and romance and occultism. It wrapt the magic of the Orient about it.

Bared of tawdry sensationalism, melodrama, and cheap moralizing, the story as known was bald enough, similar to hundreds in the back files of city dailies. One paper told the tale in half a column.

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Following upon a few mild headlines came the laconic statement:

"Yesterday at three in the afternoon George W. Orcutt, millionaire, clubman, noted whip, stabbed and instantly killed Lucas Emmet, well and favorably known as a painter of the nude. Friends for a number of years, jealousy over a beautiful model of Emmet's alienated the men. Though still friends outwardly they had been figuratively at each other's throats for a year.

"The murder occurred in Emmet's studio in the Landseer Building. Neighboring studios were occupied at the time, but no one knew anything of the tragedy, or had any suspicion of it till discovery at five o'clock by Edgar Just Brewer and Frank Adamson, artist friends of Emmet's. Orcutt and Emmet were known to have had lunch together and to have started together at 2:30 for Emmet's studio. Orcutt was seen leaving Emmet's studio at 3:30. There was no evidence of a struggle. Emmet lay on the floor in a pool of blood, his heart pierced through with a Chinese dirk having Orcutt's name in full engraved on the handle. This dirk is one of unusual workmanship and beauty, and very old. Orcutt always carried it, but as an antique to be shown, not as a weapon.

"Orcutt was apprehended at his home on Riverside Drive at 5:30 P. M. by Officer Fagan and Detective Warren, to their great surprise, as his home

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was the least likely place it was expected to find him.

"The exact circumstances of the murder may never be known. Orcutt is mentally unbalanced. At first his stunned expression and disjointed speech were looked upon as acting. But the testimony of alienists Upman and Scott who examined him last night show that his brain is seriously affected. By their diagnosis the malady is the immediate effect of a shock—in their opinion terror contingent upon the killing of his friend. Upon this premise they also base a hypothesis that the murder was not premeditated. For had it been planned his mind would have been prepared for the catastrophe and no serious shock would have resulted. Orcutt is now at his home under guard. He will be placed in an asylum for the insane, whether one for the criminal insane or in a private hospital will be at the discretion of the Court.

"Seven years ago yesterday George W. Orcutt was married to Miss Gail Revelling, daughter of the late Hon. Clayton Revelling, at one time consul to Rio Janeiro. Miss Revelling was then seventeen, and considered one of the most beautiful girls in New York. A painting of her by Hugh Orville, entitled 'Youth,' made a furore in artistic circles and was the beginning of Orville's great popularity as a painter of women. Until that period he had vainly sought recognition for his talent. It was this painting that attracted the attention of George Or-

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cutt and led to his marriage with the original. They have one child, a boy of six.

"Lucas Emmet was unmarried. He had an international reputation as a painter of nude figures. He was engaged on a work entitled 'Innocence,' a group of five elfish urchins preparatory to a swim."

The first thrill of the murder over, the public mind focused itself upon the punishment that should be meted out to the murderer. Press and pulpit, the man in the street, the newsboys, the matinee crowd, the suburbs, all of Gotham argued the case and passed judgment upon it. A few believed the testimony of the alienists, but the majority smiled cynically at or openly derided the plea of insanity. Letters and telegrams poured in upon the district attorney demanding that this "millionaire murderer" be sent to the electric chair, to Sing Sing, to Matteawan. Many of the communications contained a dire threat against the district attorney's life in case the given mandate was not obeyed.

Meanwhile, the man supposed to be George Orcutt remained in the Orcutt home under guard. Here came the district attorney daily and a succession of alienists. Orcutt was examined and his condition passed upon hourly, or so it seemed to Gail, awaiting the outcome in agony of spirit.

But the outcome to Gail was not, as with the people, where should this man be placed, *but when would he be claimed by his friends and the search for the real George Orcutt begin.*

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Every minute that first day she listened for the ring of the door-bell and every ring meant that she was found out. But day was added to day till a week had passed, and no one came to claim the stranger.

Under the alert eyes of two guards he sat in George Orcutt's room, his brows puckered in the painful effort to think that he had shown that first day. He obeyed Gail, the guards, his attendant, the alienists, the district attorney, all automatically. He lived in a dreamlike state broken by fitful gleams of lucidity, a pathetic straining effort after the consciousness he had lost. He called Gail "Dear," and though he remembered no one else from day to day, her he distinguished from the others. He would take her hand and hold it between his own, gently, starting up with fright when she drew it away.

"Don't leave me, dear, don't leave me!"

Always the same cry and in the same suffering voice.

Gail sat for hours beside him, her hand in his. His eyes, in the fleeting moments of comparative consciousness, were boyishly candid. And there was a simple dignity in his manner that gave a curious impression of poise, despite his shattered mind.

It was the man himself that finally decided the district attorney upon the course he took. He had heard alienists of repute and standing testify against a prisoner's sanity, and alienists of equal repute and

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standing testify for it; he had listened many times to the plea of a heart-broken wife, and he was repeatedly asked mercy for the sake of a child.

He watched the accused, studied him, and as the man's personality grew upon him, he began to question George Orcutt's part in the murder and to doubt the enormity of his other sins.

Gail saw him soften, saw, too, that this shrewd man of the law had begun to wonder a little, an aimless wonder as yet, a wonder that was partly annoyance that this man should not conform to the case against him. To brand George Orcutt a criminal would please the people—the voter—and it could be so easily done. Mrs. Orcutt had not engaged counsel, she waited like a dazed child for the law to take its course. He wondered if she knew how astute she was in throwing herself upon his mercy, trusting her case wholly to his honor; and if she realized the strength of her statement repeated with naïve simplicity at his every visit.

"You won't let them put him in a prison of any kind, you won't, you won't! He didn't know what he was doing. It would be as wrong to shut him up with criminals as to—to shut me—or—you."

That this innocent man should be put in a criminal institution was a new horror for Gail to contemplate, and a horror that she felt she could not live under daily. If he were searched out and his family and friends should find him herded with criminals! She had known nothing about the law

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when she asked this man for a day out of his life. A day's respite while her husband got aboard a ship and sailed away had seemed enough to ask—then; now—she knew that a day would have availed her nothing.

She had dared mightily in her ignorance and fate had done the rest—so well that she now let it sweep her along unresisting. But she could not let this hapless man be branded a criminal—— No, no, no! The awfulness of his position and her own part in it clutched her till the horror of it got into her voice.

"To make a criminal of him would be oh! a dreadful, *dreadful* wrong," was weighted with a truth that carried conviction.

The district attorney was a man who had the courage of his beliefs. Eight days after the killing of Lucas Emmet he pronounced Orcutt insane, and remanded him, a ward of the State, to a private institution, the sanatorium of Doctor Morris Underwood, near Valhalla, an institution that took only male patients and that was unusually successful in its treatment of mental diseases.

A fury of protest and abuse broke loose upon the attorney's head. Press and park agitator and people jeered and shrieked and threatened—for a day. The day after, the Emmet-Orcutt tragedy was forgotten by the public. The Japanese had fired upon the Russians at Port Arthur and the

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Russo-Japanese war was front page news for that day and for many a day thereafter.

Gail did not read the war news, she hardly knew it was there. She was still searching for mention of a lost man of unbalanced mind and Vandyke beard. But day followed upon day and each succeeding day's news was as void of the one vital matter as the day's before. There were lost men in plenty; lost women and girls; lost children; lost babies. She was amazed at the number of missing people. And dumbfounded when a week, two weeks, three weeks went by, and no notice appeared about the man she had picked up from the curbing.

Four weeks after the murder she gathered the array of dailies and piled them together to be carried out of her room. She gave orders that she did not want to see any but her regular paper thereafter. She had searched through every column of every New York daily for four weeks. She would search no more. If the man had a mother she would have found him before now. It was the thought of a heart-breaking mother that had driven Gail to seek to learn the identity of the demented man. And she had sought diligently, even though reason told her that had there been any one to claim him, this would have been done very shortly after the murder. Had he relatives or friends they must surely have seen George Orcutt's picture in the papers and noted the resemblance to the other man, and when George Orcutt was declared insane, *then*

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they must know that here, in Orcutt's home, was the man they sought and no other.

Four weeks. A man with friends could not be lost for four weeks and no search made for him. And this man had been well-groomed and was a man of breeding. The doctors had said that his insanity was caused by a shock. He had lost some one that he loved—the some one that he called "dear." Gail's lips quivered with tenderness. Alone—with no one who cared for him! Perhaps the abused charge of an attendant who was profiting by his absence! If this sort of thing should ever happen to Vance!

Vance! She was back again to the starting point of her interest. An insane father—this was not a good social heritage, no! But viewed as an influence in the developing years of Vance's life it was an infinitely better heritage than the other. All of George Orcutt's sins could be gracefully accounted for under the guise of insanity. Here was a father neither to be ashamed of nor to follow as an alluring example of profligacy. The latter had always been her fear, an icy dread in her heart that Vance would seek to emulate his father's sodden life under the youthful impression that it was an expression of manliness to live riotously. And it was not an idle fear.

From infancy Vance had adored his father, and neglect by his idol had never decreased his affection. By his own solicitation the boy went now

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twice a week to see the man he believed to be his father. Either Bryan took him in the automobile or he was driven by Gregory, the groom, behind a pair of spirited horses—the pride of the true George Orcutt and the delight of his son. It did not seem strange to Vance that his mother did not go with him. He had known only a divided household. Yet within the childish breast was always a pathetic longing for a united papa and mama. He had never understood why his parents were unlike other papas and mamas in their attitude toward each other. He had early ceased asking, for his mama's eyes always darkened with misery and his papa laughed loudly in a way he did not like.

He brought no messages now from the sanatorium. He went and came silently. There were things that he wanted to tell his mama, but he was afraid to mention his father's name for fear of bringing on a wild sobbing and frantic walking of the room.

But Gail, looking now out over the Hudson, was calm. She should seek no more to learn the identity of the stranger. He had been given into her hands. No one wanted him but herself. Four weeks! why should not this stretch to four years?—to four times four? and on and on? The four weeks had been horrible in their suspense and trepidations. But these four weeks were now behind her. And she was young—and life beckoned her.

Standing there by the window, her favorite spot,

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her eyes upon the blue river, the quickened blood of hope began to thread her veins. Then a warm glow suffused her. It was happiness—nothing less. She laughed softly, then laughed again at the strangeness of her own voice. This behind her—the nightmare terror! It was but a dream now, a scorching, rankling dream that had seared and creviced into her memory; but, even so—a dream, to be viewed retrospectively. She had saved her son's name from the brand of ignominious murder. George Orcutt was a free man. The demented stranger was luxuriously cared for and as happy as a man in his condition could be anywhere. And she and Vance were alone together. She laughed again, an almost gay little laugh.

Afterwards, she knew that her pagan joy was mostly relief in finding herself free from the man she had married. Though stoically accepted, she had never grown indifferent to his liaisons. Her pride rebelled against his open neglect. And she was ashamed of him before her friends, the servants, the passers-by in the street who turned to stare at his bloated face with its tale of debauchery.

Now he was gone for good and all. No matter how he had gone, nor why he went, nor what he had done; he was gone—gone! The breezes seemed to sing it to her, the leaves of the trees, the chirp of the sparrows. "Gone—Gone!" And she was free!

She began to plan for the future. She would

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close the Riverside Drive house with its memories of suffering and live at their summer home at Mamaroneck, except for a few months in the winter; then she would stay at a hotel. And she would travel—in her own country and the Orient. She would keep away from Europe; she knew it well already; and she would take no chance of running into "George Ormond." It was by this name that her husband was now known.

Ah! there were so many things that she would do now, which she had not had the heart to do before. And she would spare no expense to give whatever comfort and happiness she could to the crazy stranger who had helped her to her freedom. He should be her tenderest charge always.

More, she felt charitable to the world at large. She sent checks to numerous Homes and Societies that had long vainly solicited Mrs. Orcutt's patronage. She smiled whimsically to think that not suffering but relief from suffering had quickened her sympathies. She did not know that she was unconsciously trying to propitiate the gods—trying to bribe fate to leave her and her child alone now that they were comparatively happy.

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V

IT was May.

Gail sat in the sun-parlor overlooking the Hudson. The windows were open and a warm breeze swept through it. She drew her breath in deeply, responsive to the radiance of the day, the sunny, blue-skyed, spring-perfumed day. Three months! —and all was well.

The Mamaroneck house, now undergoing changes in construction and furnishings, would be completed in another month. Soon she would be by the Sound, in a house that held no memories of her husband; for it was her own castle, and one that Orcutt, by mutual arrangement, had never visited. And Kate Lorme, the friend she loved best in the whole world, would be with her, the motherly woman who had known and been devoted to her since babyhood, the one person she could trust—not to tell her secret to, but to reveal her emotions before.

A home free from memories, her boy, her friend, and the blue water!

"Mama!"

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The mother turned quickly, all tenderness and love.

"Did you have a nice ride?" she asked, and kissed the upheld face.

The boy rested a hand on the arm of her chair.

"Yes," came quietly. Then—"How old will I need to be before I can have a horse?" he asked. "A pony's nice, but a horse stands up so much higher. I like papa's saddle horse; he holds his head 'way up and moves it as though he's going to rear and tear things to pieces, but he doesn't. Ponies aren't very frisky."

"Frisky enough for a boy of six, dear." She smiled, and kissed him again. "Surely, you're not tired of Cinders. You were so joyful over him but a year ago."

"No; I'm not tired of him; he's awfully cute." He laughed heartily. "He kicked out his legs today all of a sudden and jolted my cap off. I wish he'd kick oftener. It was sport holding on."

"And you fed the squirrels and pigeons?"

"Yes." His eyes sparkled. "There was another boy tried to get my pigeons away from me; he kept throwing bread at his feet and on his shoulders and clucked for 'em to come to him."

"And they stayed around you?"

"Most of 'em. And those that went to him just snatched the bread and flew back to me again. They didn't know him, you see; then he was noisy

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and waved his arms too much. You have to be ju—ust as quiet and move as slo—ow——"

The boy leaned a little against her knee and looked at her out of eyes whose lids were now partly closed. His mother waited patiently, knowing that this attitude was the preliminary of a question that he was doubtful about voicing.

There was a strong resemblance between mother and son. The features of both were finely chiseled, giving the immediate effect of distinction. Strength of will and mind was revealed, not by undue prominence of jaw or brow but by a unity of forceful lines so masterfully distributed that instead of detracting from, they were in themselves largely responsible for the famed beauty of Mrs. George Orcutt and her son. The boy's eyes were a lighter gray than the woman's, but they had the same heavy black fringe encircling them, doubling in effect their real size. His brown hair still had a childish golden tint seemingly far removed from the bronze of the mother's. But her hair had been as gold-tinted as his when she was a child. In appearance the boy had partaken wholly of the mother; even the slow smile, that came so rarely, was a duplicate of hers. Yet there was an immeasurable difference in the very likeness between them, a difference due to sex; even at six years, scarcely beyond babyhood, the boy's features were of a more virile cast than the adult woman's, of a bold design that bespoke masculinity. The mother was called "beautiful,"

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the son "handsome," a subtle distinction usually made unconsciously. But to Gail these separate designations for features termed "exactly alike" were pregnant with meaning. He was a man-child, made in the mold of his father, destined to lead a man's life, to fulfil a man's destiny.

This was her somber thought as she watched him. He was longer than usual in bringing himself to the point of actual questioning. He began tentatively.

"Gregory likes to watch me feed the pigeons—So do the nurse-maids—there are always nurse-maids and babies there. . . . Gregory talks to 'em, the maids,—a groom and maid don't have to be introduced, you see, they just talk and tell each other their names. Mostly they talk 'bout themselves and laugh, kind of silly, I think. To-day—they talked about—you know——"

His eyes opened to their fullness, held hers with the authority of a judge. His mother shivered. Would he never cease talking about it? But she explained as she had so many times before.

"Yes—but Papa did that when he was out of his mind, dear. Papa didn't know what he was doing, so it wasn't wrong, only sad, very sad."

"But you said a *man*——"

"Yes; Mr. Lucas Emmet, one of his friends—so he didn't mean to kill him, you see, dear."

"You—are sure, *sure* it wasn't a—lady he killed? She—one of the maids said that when I was grown

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I'd be a—a lady-killer like my father—a *lady*-killer!"

The boy waited breathlessly. His voice came again, in a whisper.

"Will I—kill somebody when I grow up? I want to be like Papa and ride a horse and drive a tallyho—but I don't want to kill anybody. *Was* it a—lady?—and will I——"

"Hush!"

"Oh!" cried the child, frightened before the pallid Mama that had replaced the joyous one.

"A lady-killer is merely a term for a man that the ladies all admire," explained the mother shakily. "It is not a nice expression."

The child's worried expression lifted. He nodded his head in understanding. His governess had explained the use of hyperbole—he being prone, as children are, to take all statements too literally—and she had illustrated her lesson by examples from the servants' use of the phrases "tickled to death," "knocked senseless," "up in the air," "dead gone" and like exaggerations.

"I'm glad Papa didn't kill a lady," he said simply. "Even if he wasn't right in his head it would have seemed cowardly to hurt a lady. Gregory says a man is made strong on purpose to support a lady—he told one of the maids that. He says a lady should lean on a man, and that he should use his arm for her service. The maid, her name's Hilda, is real pretty. Her hands are kind of red, but she

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has a cute little foot—Gregory told her it was as little as yours." He looked down at his mother's, contemplatively. "I don't think it is, though."

A new dread leapt to Gail Orcutt's eyes.

"How would you like Miss Lauder to ride with you?" she cried.

"Miss Lauder?" Vance's tone was scornful. "I don't want a woman taking care of me when I go out. She's all right to teach me lessons and do things for me in the house. Babies and girls have women tagging them round. I like Gregory—he tells me 'bout the big hunts he used to ride in in Scotland and the packs of hounds they had, and how the deer and boars act when they're surrounded. He's shot quail, too, and knows 'bout horse races. I like to talk 'bout the things men do. Women are all right for girls, but I'm not a girl."

"No," said his mother slowly, to herself rather than to him. "You're a man-child."

Vance's arms went around her neck.

"Don't cry, Mama. I'll be your *boy,* always. Aunt Kate Lorme always calls Uncle Dick her 'boy,' and he's lots older'n Papa. It sounds silly to hear a big man called a 'boy,' but I'll let you do it. Gregory says it makes a fellow manly to stand for women's weaknesses. It's a weakness for a woman to want a man to be a boy always, isn't it?" he queried anxiously. "I didn't like to ask Gregory just what a 'weakness' is. You see he was talking

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to Hilda, not me. He's going to marry Hilda, I guess. Anyhow, he asked her and she said 'yes.' "

"You listened!"

"Oh, no! I just heard. They always talk before me. Gregory said he loved Hilda and he didn't care if everybody in the Park knew it. She asked him to get her a place here as housemaid after they're married. And he said he would if he could. Hilda's a nice girl, *I* think."

The woman smiled tenderly, and drew the boy within her arms.

"We shall have to have Hilda, I see."

Vance's laugh rang out merrily. But it was because the smiles had come to his Mama's face again.

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VI

WHAT so rare as a day in June? Ah! a day in September at Mamaroneck, with a myriad sun diamonds on the water, and white yachts that float like great birds on the waves," cried Gail, stretching her arms toward the sea. "I'm happy! happy! I'm not sure that my delirium of joy is not plain hysterics, but—I don't care a jot."

"That's good, Gail."

It was Mr. Lorme who spoke. He was a pink and silvery bland-faced man of fifty-five, looking always as freshly scrubbed and clear-eyed as an advertisement baby. He sat now in a deep willow rocker on the veranda, immaculate in white flannels, a pink carnation in his hand. He waved its long stem, jubilantly.

"Hurrah! It's good to hear you say you don't care, Gail. You've always cared so blasted much."

"Which was a great mistake, I now see," laughed Gail, pirouetting giddily. "I'm a dryad. My rôle is to gambol and sing. Since time began there has never been a more glorious summer than this!"

"Right!"

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The voice was hearty, as was everything about Kate Lorme. She was as pink and cherubic as her husband. Her eyes, like blue larkspur, looked fondly at the laughing "dryad." In a moment Gail's arms were around her.

"Stay here with me during October, Kate, you and Dick. We will motor every day—feast ourselves to bursting with autumn's gorgeous golds and reds. I had forgotten that the world is so beautiful. You will stay—you will!"

"Sure, Gail girl," assented Mrs. Lorme.

Gail kissed each round, rosy cheek.

"You blessed old darling!" she crooned. Then, lightly as the dryad she claimed to be, she ran from the porch to the velvety cushioned lawn down to the Sound, trilling an air from *Aïda*.

Mrs. Lorme reached out a hand and touched her husband's. There was a film of moisture in her eyes.

"I never realized till this summer just what Gail had suffered. I'd surely have killed George if I'd known she would be so like her old self without him."

Mr. Lorme chuckled.

"If George had only known the danger he was in from you, Kate, he would 've died from sheer fright."

Mrs. Lorme laughed, too, a gurgling fat laugh. Her eyes still followed the dancing figure.

"Why, bless me, Dick, she's our Gail Revelling

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again, as light-hearted and girlish as she was before she met that scoundrel Orcutt. She's been a tragedy queen for so long I had almost forgotten what a blithesome lass she was. This has been a wonderful summer. But—will it last? I wonder."

"Eh?"

"Dick, I wonder if it hasn't been too wonderful? Doesn't there seem something like—like defiance in her happiness? A little too much protesting, too much—delirium in it?"

Mr. Lorme smiled, airily.

"A colt that's been shut up has to prance and kick up its heels a little, old girl. Gail's the loveliest thing under the sun, and the most bewitching. It's been a deuced fine summer—almost as good 's having children of our own to have her and Vance to dote on. There's a chap! Vance is like old Frank Orcutt, George's father—as honest as the day. He inherits Gail's beauty, and nothing from George that I can see. He'll redeem the Orcutt name, give it the dignity that Frank Orcutt did."

"I wonder how George is?" mused Mrs. Lorme. "Vance hasn't been to see him since they came to Mamaroneck, and it's not more than twenty miles from here."

"Child like, he's lost his interest——"

"No," said Mrs. Lorme decidedly. "It's because he's sensed that Gail doesn't want him to go. It's pathetic the way the little fellow enjoys seeing her happy. But he hasn't forgotten his father. It's

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curious how he adores that wastrel. I believe he would risk even making Gail unhappy if George knew him and took any pleasure in his company." She leaned forward, squinted up her eyes so as to see better. "Gail must have intercepted the letter carrier—isn't that a letter in her hand? And what's happened?" she cried. "Look at her, Dick!"

Mr. Lorme glanced carelessly across the lawn at the figure moving slowly toward them, a drooping, listless figure, unlike the dryad that had skimmed over the grass a few minutes before. His mind was on the letter carrier. He went hurriedly into the house to get a letter he wanted to mail. His wife gazed anxiously ahead, fearful; yet she knew not of what. She rose and went down the path to meet her, her arms held out protectingly.

"What is it, Gail? What has happened?"

Gail held out a letter.

"Read," she moaned, and pushed Mrs. Lorme to a bench, sliding beside her to the ground, her head burying itself against the woman's knees.

The letter was from Morris Underwood, the alienist in whose charge Orcutt had been placed. It read:

"DEAR MRS. ORCUTT:

"For the past three months Mr. Orcutt has been steadily improving. His condition is now so satisfactory that I have notified the District Attorney that there is no occasion for him to remain in a sanatorium. Acting upon this notification, Drs. Up-

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man and Scott, appointed by the law, have this week examined Mr. Orcutt, and they concur in my opinion. The District Attorney has consented to his discharge. You should shortly receive a communication from him and legal instructions as to the definite steps to take for Mr. Orcutt's removal from my custody, if such have not already preceded this letter. Mr. Orcutt will still be under the espionage of the State, but only perfunctorily. I did not consult you about his removal, feeling that it would be kinder not to arouse hopes till I had something definite to tell you.

"Though Mr. Orcutt is virtually a well man, he is still unable to remember about himself and his personal affairs. Old associations may (I only say may) bring him to full consciousness of his past. If this does not follow, he will have to learn anew about his family and associates. In either case early renewal of his family life is advised.

"It would be well for you and your little son to see him here once before his return home. He remembers having seen Vance here; of you he has no recollection. It seems to impress him as very odd, and amusingly so, that he should have a wife and child. It will be easier for him to adjust himself to the new environment (his home will now be new to him) if he first loses any sense of strangeness he may have in your society.

"Please come prepared to find a husband who does not know you and is somewhat frightened over the prospect of meeting you.

"Kindly notify me upon receipt of this as to the day and hour of your visit.

"Yours respectfully,

"MORRIS UNDERWOOD."

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Mrs. Lorme let the letter weakly flutter to the floor. She strove in vain for words to give comfort to the woman crouching at her knees. But what was there to say or do in this awful dilemma —awful even to her restricted knowledge of it.

"Blast George!" she uttered feebly. "Blast the whelp!" She stroked the soft hair. "Gail, my dear girl. Oh, if there was only something I could do to rid you of him."

Gail's face rose slowly, more stricken with terror than her friend had yet seen it. She stumbled to her feet.

"You can't help me, Kate. . . . No one can help! No one can help me!"

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VII

GEORGE ORCUTT'S wife locked herself in her room and sat down alone to face her problem. Even in the anxieties and fears of the first weeks after the murder she had not in her wildest moments conjectured anything so terrible as the reality confronting her. She had feared that the man she had substituted for her husband would suddenly come into his reason and declare who he was, and that herself and her husband would be apprehended, herself as an accessory after the crime; she had feared that some one would come forth and claim the man and arraign her on a charge of abduction; she had feared that Orcutt would be recognized or do something inadvertently to betray himself. She had pictured herself in the criminal docket, had shivered and almost shrieked aloud under the supposititious belief that she was being carried to prison. There had been nothing that she had not conjectured and harrowed her nerves over save the awful fact now staring at her from Doctor Underwood's letter.

She must take a strange man into her home as

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her husband! as Vance's father! That, or denounce the real husband and father. The two roads spread baldly before her. There were no side paths through which she could slip secretly and evade both highways. None. The eyes of the law would be upon her; and of the press and the public.

She looked out over the Sound, blue with the reflected blueness of a cloudless sky, looked at the rookery where she had been standing a short half-hour before when the letter carrier handed her an innocent-looking white missive. . . . She had been singing—singing and happy and unafraid of the future. . . . Fate, in her cruelly ironic way, had allowed her to catch breath and to hope—ah! even to believe that she had successfully defied her!

She had thought the game ended—and it had only begun!

And somehow she must win. To lay down her hand now was to lose no less fully than she should lose at any time. She had started in with open eyes to play a dangerous game. Her hand was cruelly weak and the cards against her cruelly strong. But there was still a fighting chance. This man was alone in the world. He was a gentleman, and kindly. Even his halting remarks had been voiced in tones that held a caressing cadence. He could not but respond to Vance's winsome nature. Once let him learn to love the child and he might voluntarily protect him. Should he regain memory of his past he could go away and resume his own name.

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Some way could surely be found for him to preserve his own identity, and that of George Orcutt —at intervals sufficiently often to satisfy the law.

"Insight—Wit—Nerve!" These were the three magic possessions that must now be hers. Must be! She was fighting for her boy's future. *Fighting*—Yes, it was fighting now. Her eyes blazed hotly. Men had fought despicably for a throne, men great in the annals of history. She would fight—fairly, if she could, but fight *somehow*—to save her boy from knowing himself the son of a murderer.

A grim defiance replaced the girlish curves of cheeks and lips. Shivering, as though she were touching actual things, she ran over her weapons of defense—her courage, her quickness of wit, her insight into the motives of others, the unreckonable strength of feminine beauty and charm.

She rose from her silent conference—a woman inexpressibly weary, in whom joy and careless laughter seemed never to have been. The radiant, pirouetting girl of an hour before was gone as completely as though she had physically died.

She wrote briefly to Doctor Underwood that she would arrive at the sanatorium the next morning at eleven o'clock. She then called the housekeeper and gave orders for her to open the town house on the same day, and to close the Mamaroneck house as soon as could be done thereafter. To Mrs. Lorme she explained the reason for this.

"I want no tragic memories connected with this

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place," she said unsteadily. "I have been truly happy here this past summer—yes happy! though I am still in wonder over it. And I have never been as unhappy here as in town. George never came here."

"Not he!" exclaimed her friend. "He wanted Saratoga, when there was horse-racing, or Narragansett or Atlantic City."

Gail did not heed her outbreak.

"Kate," she said softly, "Vance is wild with joy because his—father is coming home."

"And that pleases you!" ejaculated Mrs. Lorme in amazement. "Upon my word! A few months ago you were frantic because the child wanted to visit George—— Forgive me, Gail, I didn't mean to question your actions. I was so surprised I spoke without thinking."

"No matter, Kate. I shall probably surprise you more and more. I amaze myself. It is a curious sensation to find myself doing things seemingly outside my own volition. Wait!"—intercepting her friend's disturbed utterance. "It is only *seemingly* involitional. The amazement comes from finding that I am a different woman than I had supposed. I do things that I can't quite understand how I—dare. Yet—I must. I have no power not to do them. I am afraid, horribly afraid—yet I go on—I can only tick-tock, tick-tock to the inevitable end—whether black midnight or sunlit noonday. Do you remember Charlie Abbot's telling us how he

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was always sure he was going to turn and run when the enemy opened fire, but that he couldn't do anything but advance when the time really came. Can't you hear him say, 'It was just as though there was some other fellow inside my hide running into the firing-line and I a-looking on dumb with surprise'? She shivered visibly. "It is madness, stark, raving madness, yet—I shall bring *him* home!"

"Um-m," murmured Kate Lorme. "But what else could you do now that the doctors have ordered his removal? George is a wastrel, but it's his house, and you're his wife and Vance is his child." She stopped before Gail's start and deathly pallor. "La! la! I seem bent to say the wrong thing. You've sort of flustered me with your pleasure in Vance's desire to see his father."

"I was clutching at straws. That Vance should be happy, if only for a little while, seemed something to offset my misery."

"But why be miserable, dear? Why should you not divorce George and have your liberty? Even though you have condoned his past offences he will soon give you fresh grounds. Dick and I have been talking it over and we feel that you should be free of the scoundrel once and for all. You owe it to yourself. You are young, with love and happiness your due."

"It is too late," came drearily.

"Too late! Why? Your father believed in keeping everything under cover, sores and all.

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Well, I don't. And now that your domestic affairs have become public property despite you, why not air them a little more and be free? Gail, you must! Dick and I look upon you as our own child, and it is as our own daughter that we advise this."

"Only it is Gail Orcutt that you advise," was the low, tired answer. "And she was wound up ages ago to go on just this way. She wishes with all her heart that she had divorced George Orcutt seven years ago; she wishes—yes! that he was paying the penalty of his crime; and she may wish later that she had not done what—she—is going—to do now—if she can."

"Then don't do it, child, whatever it is," pleaded the elder woman.

Gail's lips parted over a moan. She walked back and forth, her tired brain still struggling with its burden of thought.

"Good? What is a *good* woman? It would not be good to sacrifice my baby. Yet—— Oh! I am so afraid to go on—— And—somehow that's the reason I must. I gave Vance his father. I now know that I divined then that George was not a fit husband. But *I* wanted him for my own pleasure. I married him. Now I must pay the best that I can—pay him, my baby. Before everything else in the world I owe Vance reparation. To hold back in fear for myself—when I may save him from ever knowing—even the chance that I *may* win is enough to arm me with courage for this or—anything. . . .

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"There is no one but myself and Vance. We are alone. We must stand or fall by ourselves. There is no one of our blood to help us—or to be hurt through us. A child should have his chance—even could *he* know now, he should surely want that a little child should not be burdened with shame. To think himself the son of a good father! oh my dear! my baby! that would mean more to you than anything else in the world. And perhaps—— If I am courageous—— *If?* Ah! I must be. I *will be!*"

She dropped beside her friend on the divan, convulsed with sobs, a racking torrent of grief and dread.

Kate Lorme folded her in her arms.

"Divorce George," she pleaded. "Start over."

"The moving finger has passed beyond that line, Kate," came brokenly.

"Then what do you intend to do?"

The gray eyes, deep as forest pools now, gazed straight ahead.

"I am not a seer, Kate. I am simply waiting till —to-morrow."

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VIII

DOCTOR UNDERWOOD, a big hulking man with little black eyes that squinted behind thick glasses, and a broad flat face, Chinese in its impassivity, sat opposite Gail in his private office, talking.

"Mr. Orcutt's is a curious case," said he. "Not curious because of his recovering his sanity and failing to remember who he is and particular instances in his life—such occurrences are common. In fact, the vagaries of the workings of the mind in both sane and insane make no case actually strange to the alienist. It is another aspect of your husband's case that puzzles me. I have been told, and authoritatively, that he was a hard drinker, a fast liver, licentious, given over entirely to material pleasures."

"Why are you speaking of this?" Gail asked, as Doctor Underwood's silence seemed to demand an answer. Her voice was not wholly steady, despite her heroic efforts at calmness.

"In hopes that you may be able to throw some light on a very vexing question. Your husband is

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either the most maligned man of his time or else he deliberately chose to play a rôle. I cannot conceive of his ever being anything but a gentleman, a cultured, honorable man of temperate habits and pure thoughts."

"Yet—he killed Lucas Emmet and—about a—woman."

"It remains a question who killed Lucas Emmet," answered the physician sharply. "I am not convinced that my patient did it."

Her eyes met his scrutinizing ones unflinchingly.

"The George Orcutt I knew was—was not—maligned."

"Mrs. Orcutt, your husband to-day is as different from the man the newspapers described as white from black. You will find this out for yourself in time. But now I ask you to take my word for it, and to meet him in kindly spirit. Let him see that you are his friend."

"You like him!"

"I seldom meet with a man as interesting and as likable. I shall miss our discussions on psychology and biology greatly."

"Psychology—biology," she muttered. "Psychology!—biology!"

"Ah! Then you did not know of his interest in these subjects."

"No," she breathed, her voice a whimper of fear. "No."

Her face sank to her hand. Was it any use to

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struggle further? Had she not better confess the truth now, the awful truth? George Orcutt with an intimate knowledge of the sciences was too unbelievable for his friends to accept. And could she force her will on a man such as this?

"Your husband has evidently kept his studious life very secret indeed," continued the alienist. "He has hid his virtues and made a parade of his physical dissipations, reversing the usual order. Um-m! Um-m! His grosser self though, Mrs. Orcutt, is buried very deep now, and will be, as long as memory of his past is lost, which loss may be permanent. He has been virtually well for three months and yet memory of himself and his personal experiences is wholly missing. He has not lost the memory of written language, nor of the subject matter of books he has read, nor of the arts and sciences he has studied, but he knows these only as they pertain to themselves and not at all in association with himself and the part they have played in his life.

"He hasn't the faintest idea of how or why or when he ever acquired his knowledge. He is like a phonograph into which records have been read; yes, veritably, for he seems to have as little actual connection with the many important and erudite facts he enunciates as a machine. I do not mean by this that he talks like a parrot, no indeed; he is interested, enthusiastic, returning argument for argument, his brain as active in marshalling his sub-

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jects and correlating his details as mine is. It is only that he, like the phonograph, seems never to have been part and parcel of the things about which he discourses so admirably. He does not remember his name but he knows the history of the de Medici family; he has no recollection of himself as a boy but he knows about the boyhood of Lincoln and Cromwell and the Great Corsican. An interesting case, a most interesting case."

"But now?—does he remember about the things he does now?" asked Gail faintly.

"Yes; he is perfectly normal as regards his present experiences. He will not know you for his wife to-day till he is told, but when you come again he will remember as fully the events of to-day as I. Ah!—when have you arranged for him to return home? He insisted that I should leave the whole matter to you."

"Monday, I think," she responded in a low voice. "Our town house is just now being opened and could scarcely be ready for occupancy before then. That—will do?"

"Yes, or later. No rush is necessary. Now"—body bent forward, face lowered to a line with hers—"have you anything to say to me? Think carefully. Your husband is—your husband, Mrs. Orcutt. The law is with him, I am with him, in desiring this. He is expecting his *wife*. Do you think you fully understand?"

Gail sat silent. She felt her courage oozing from

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out her pores, leaving her sick with weakness. She could not go on. She had not calculated aright. To pit her woman's feeble strength against the law—against the penetrating mind of this alienist—against *him,* the other, who believed himself her husband, and so believing——

Morris Underwood watched her from behind his thick glasses with their black frames. To her fevered conception he had the look of an ogre.

A deathly nausea assailed her. Doctor Underwood was waiting for her to speak—and she could not!

"Mama!"

Face pressed against the window, Vance peered in for an instant, his eyes brimming with glee. He was accompanied by a hospital attendant who was conducting him to his father.

Her boy!

The mother's body became rigid: steel in endurance. The twentieth century and civilization and dependent femininity!—all were blotted out. She was primal, a female defending her young, savage and fearless as a lioness in the jungle.

She rose and faced the alienist, beneath her soft armor the strength now to fight a multitude.

Her manner was haughty.

"I understand, fully. And I have nothing to say to you but this: I shall not promise to be friends with my husband, doctor. It is his home and he can go to it without permission from me. He and

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I will live our lives apart as we have before. Will you please not encourage him to think otherwise."

"Ah! that is your attitude. Do you think it fair?"

She flashed a keen glance at the man's inscrutable face, a little shiver of fear playing down her back at the curious inflection of his voice. An intense dislike for him swept her. There came a clammy feeling that he, like herself, was wearing a mask. It was borne in upon her that here was an enemy, and one to be feared. But she answered evenly:

"That matter, I think, rests between me and my husband. When he leaves here he is beyond your jurisdiction, is he not?"

"Technically," he retorted. "But inside or outside my walls I am his friend, Mrs. Orcutt."

"But not necessarily my enemy," she said archly, favoring him with a brilliant smile. "Won't you please leave the matter to me—the one who is most vitally concerned. I may know better what is fair than you. I am a woman and a mother."

"I abdicate in favor of the woman and mother," he pronounced gravely. "Are you ready to see him?"

"Yes," she said evenly. "But alone. Will you please have Vance taken to the car before I go in."

She stood motionless, her hands pressed tightly together, while the doctor saw that her order was carried into effect. "Come," he then said, and led her through the hall to a door partly open, ushered her in and closed the door upon her.

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IX

AT the sound of Gail Orcutt's step the man standing by the window slowly turned and faced her. He did not advance; nor did she, further, after a full view of him. She stood stock-still, breathless with a new amazement. He did not even look like George Orcutt. Save for the Vandyke beard and the full brow all resemblance was gone. Here were not George's nerveless mouth, nor his flaccid cheeks nor vacuous expression. No; the mouth was firm, characterful, the eyes clear and strikingly intelligent, the flesh compact, glowing with the health of pure living. And he held himself with soldier-like erectness.

"Gail!"

He flushed as he pronounced her name, his eyes on hers in somewhat abashed questioning.

She started violently, and stepped back, stretched out her hands to push him away. But he did not attempt to approach her.

"You are afraid of me?" he asked. "Why?—because you fear I am insane and may hurt you?"

"No," she cried, and withdrew a step further.

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His eyes searched her features, dwelt on them one by one, swiftly traversed her slender, shapely body.

"It is all very strange," said he, a flicker of humor about his lips. "But the strangest of all is to find myself possessed of a beautiful wife—and not to be able to recollect anything about her. To have been your lover, husband, the father of your child—and not to recollect one moment of it all. It is inexplicable."

His eyes were deeply admiring, his voice vibrant with tenderness. Gail felt herself shivering. His admiration had been the thing she had dreaded most and had felt would be the most difficult to combat.

"What is it?" he persisted, noting her alarm. "You fear me for some reason."

"Hasn't Doctor Underwood — told — you — about——"

He folded his arms.

"I have been told that I killed a man, my friend, and over a—woman. . . . Did I? . . . . Ah! your eyes say 'yes.' Well, now tell me what you did to drive me from you?"

"I—what *I* did?"

"Yes—you. It is not incompatible with my judgment of myself that I should have killed a man. I can conceive of incentives for doing that—yes, and without regret. But it is inconceivable that I should have been faithless to *you*—and because of some pitiable creature. Unless——"

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"What?" she whispered, almost without volition.

"Unless you goaded me to it by your indifference to my love. But there was still Vance. No! ask me to believe anything but that I dishonored you and my boy."

She felt herself reeling. She had not before thought of the cruelty of imposing George Orcutt's past on an innocent man. She tried to reach a chair. With quick hand he caught up the chair and pushed it toward her. His arm encircled her shoulder as he endeavored to guide her to its depth.

With a cry of terror she flung his arm off and stood erect, her eyes ablaze.

"Don't touch me," she screamed.

"Sit down, please," he entreated, then he stood looking down on her as she clung tremblingly to the arms of the rocker. "Do you feel faint? Shall I call Doctor Underwood?"

"No, no!"

He brought a glass of water.

"Drink this and try to calm yourself. Come, there is nothing to be frightened over. When you are composed enough to talk I am ready to listen to whatever you may have to tell me and to obey your commands to the letter. Truly, I'm a great deal more afraid of you than you are of me."

The laughter in his voice gave her an assurance that no verbal protestation could. She interpreted him as a soldier of fortune, accepting with equanimity victory or defeat, not refusing the luxuries that

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fate might bestow, but accepting calmly, even if ironically, her proffered hardships. She raised her eyes valiantly—only to find his bent admiringly upon her.

"Don't stare at me so!" she cried out impulsively, then reddened at a rudeness she had not intended, and at his still searching gaze.

"I can't help it. To tell the truth I'm so befuddled I don't know just how to act. You're as strange to me as though I had never seen you before—yet, you're my wife, my *wife!*"

He walked to the window, returned, looked down at her curiously.

"You have borne me a child—you must have loved me once. And the boy—he loves me now. . . . Yet it's so strange for me to contemplate my own wife that I can only look at her in stupid bewilderment. And to find myself rich, literally a man of millions! it's staggering. Everything that represents my past life seems utterly foreign to me—wealth, a wife, a child, a reputation for sordid amours." He walked the room again. "It's weird—this returning to a past that somehow doesn't fit."

A flash of humor lighted his whole face, yet there was no muscular disturbance of the features—a phenomenon so striking and withal so singularly winning that Gail forgot her fears for the instant and gazed at him in round-eyed curiosity. He misinterpreted her expression.

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"It isn't exactly diplomatic to say this to you, I know. But the idea of a wife is the most staggering of all. When I first beheld you I felt a wave of tenderness sweep over me that made me for a moment believe you had kindled a forgotten passion. But no; it was your beauty, your charm, the altogether alluring sweetness of you. . . .

"I should like to take you close in my arms and kiss you—but as a woman that appeals to the man I am to-day, not because of an affection that once existed between us."

Another expression lighted his countenance, an intensity of longing.

"Ah—the past!—to find it again. This baffling of memory is maddening!" He looked at her steadily. "Doubly maddening now that you are a part of that past. You command me not to touch you ever so casually, yet—I have been your husband and lover. We——"

He stopped before the tremulous cry that escaped her and the blushes that crimsoned her face from hair to neck-band. He laughed, with a sort of boyish enjoyment in her discomfiture.

"Ah!—and you are now ashamed. Tell me why, my wife. Is it because I have forgotten? But why should that make me seem strange to you? I am no less your husband."

She clutched at this opening. Her embarrassment lost itself in the thought of the battle yet to be won.

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"'Don't stare at me so!'"—*Page 65*

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"No, you are no less my husband than you have been for seven years," she uttered coldly. "Six months ended our marriage save in name and outward formality."

As she looked into his frank face and felt the straightforward nature confronting her duplicity she found herself wavering again. Could she carry out her deception day after day under the honest eyes now gazing so steadily into hers? Would she not grow confused in contact with his simple directness? And his strength that she so readily felt—could she meet it successfully?

"Tell me why our marriage ended in six months," he insisted gently.

No; it would not be easy to go on; but it was impossible to stop. Her articulatory muscles were working automatically, giving birth to words even as she debated.

"Will you listen patiently while I tell you a little tale?" she asked.

"About you and me?"

"About George Orcutt and Gail Revelling," she answered, averting her eyes. She felt less guilty toward him in using the subterfuge.

She spoke in a low voice.

"Gail's mother died while she was a baby. She was brought up by her father and an old Brazilian nurse. The mother was a Brazilian of Spanish and French blood. From the time Gail could ask for a story she was fed on romance by the old Carlotta.

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Ah! those were strange tales she heard!—but in all, love was the central theme. Carlotta did not care for tragedy in itself. There were always a beautiful señorita and a gallant cavalier, separated sometimes by cruel parents or mercenary relatives, or again divided by jealousy and anger. But no matter how harrowing the separation nor how heightened with adventure—elopement, bloodshed, war—in the end the loving pair married and lived faithful to each other till death parted them—and even after—for one of the choicest stories was where the husband shut himself up in his castle and never looked on a woman's face again.

"These seemingly virtuous tales of the old Carlotta were bad for the child Gail. They misrepresented life." Her eyes flamed with passion. "They were founded on lies. The girl was taught to believe a man faithful to the woman he married. Marriage was one long honeymoon. And the gay cavalier was handsome and wealthy and somewhat of a swaggerer, a daring brigand outwardly, with a heart tender and true." She laughed bitterly. "Was it any wonder the seventeen-year-old Gail took George Orcutt for a knight? Even his marks of dissipation helped on the illusion. She loved, not him, but the knight she believed him, loved madly, pouring out her love in ecstatic caresses——"

"Ah!"

She turned swiftly upon his exultant exclamation.

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"To her shame, now! If she lived to be a thousand she would shudder under George Orcutt's touch and the remembrance of those days. There were a month of courtship and six months of marriage while she was blindly happy. Blindly, for she had shared him from the beginning with a public dancer that he had met the same evening he first saw her. And a previous favorite shared him with both wife and dancer. It was jealousy of the dancer for this woman—they were both indifferent to the wife, knowing that she did not really count—that enlightened Gail about her knight. The dancer followed him home and——"

The dry sob that cut off her words was sympathy for the girl, Gail. The old poignant anguish welled up. The flood of her own misery drowned the contrition she had felt in hurting the man before her. He became simply Man—cruel, sensual, faithless to all principle and honor.

She resumed her story, the softness gone from her voice.

"They—the other two—continued their fight, but it was about air. George had deserted both for yet another. The wife did not even struggle—she learned in one interview that her day was over, that in reality it had never been except in her own deluded imagination. Her life had not been of a nature to make her self-reliant. She did go to her father—Ah-h!" beating her hands fiercely together in a torrent of memory—"She was sent back the

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same day to her home, her path mapped out for her—her tortuous path that she has walked for seven years—and—is—still walking. . . . She is not quite—sure—whether she—could have acted—differently. . . . The child was coming——"

"Stop!"

She rose and faced him.

"That is 'Why.'"

A spot of red flamed his either cheek.

"It's a damnable past to fall heir to. But in God's truth, Gail, I am not that man."

"You—are—not——" She felt the floor sinking beneath her.

"No!" His tone was authoritative. "It is a case of double personality. It must be. Two separate and distinct personalities occupy my body—one, a brute,—the other, well, at least, a gentleman."

She laughed—a long, shrill peal of hysteria.

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X

TO be prepared for exposure, to await with bated breath the denouncement of herself as a hypocrite and a cheat, then—to have her duplicity bolstered up into an interesting phenomenon, weighty with the trade-mark of science. It was ghastly funny.

"Don't laugh, Gail!" said the man sternly. "You must believe me. There are two George Orcutts —two. I, the *I* of to-day, refuse to be punished for the sins of the other George."

She waited a moment before answering, looked at him meditatively. He was helping her—just as he had helped her before. She had looked to find a double of George Orcutt that might serve her for a day; and he, the man before her, had risen out of the curbing to save her! And now he had strengthened her pitifully weak hand with this card! Double personality! She knew too little about it to venture to use it herself. But she realized that it would account for many of the differences between this man and the real George—differences for which all her soul's harrowing had not been able

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to create a satisfying explanation. He was helping her—even if unconsciously. And there was a boyish candor in his eyes. A nausea, not of weakness now, but revolt, assailed her. She did not want to hurt him. It was almost as though she was hurting Vance.

Vance!

Her voice came now, and coldly:

"It is not for you to choose, as far as your relations with me are concerned. I cannot prevent your return to your home, nor do I desire to, but I can leave the house if you intrude upon my privacy. I am not now financially in your power as I was seven years ago. When your father died last year he left the Mamaroneck house to me, and the incomes from the Bowdoin apartments and the Orcutt office building. He also provided for Vance's minority independently of you. And your property is safeguarded so that you can use only the income. Your father was as insistent that I should live with you and preserve 'the integrity of the family' as mine was, but his will shows that he knew the same George that I knew—yourself, no other."

The man was pale now, and his eyes were no longer mildly brown; they were black with anger. Yet he spoke calmly, even with pleasing dignity.

"I contend that I am not the man who dishonored you by his unfaithfulness. I demand that you allow me to prove to you the sort of man I am now. I do not intend that you shall belittle me in my son's

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eyes and in our friends' estimation by punishing me for acts that *I* did not commit. You shall treat me with the respect that my present personality deserves." He held out his hand. "Are we to be friends, my wife?"

"And if I refuse?"

"I am asking only justice. I appreciate what you have suffered through the other George Orcutt. But he is a stranger to me—I should not be held responsible for his sins."

Again she maintained a long silence, trying to find the best way to meet his challenge. She was stupefied at the situation she found herself in—the man's calm assumption of being her master, and his refusal to identify himself with George Orcutt's past. She felt her ground slipping from under her.

"I asked you what you would do if I refused to accept your proffered friendship?" she asked in a low voice. "You—cannot—force me into—anything against my will."

"Nor have I any desire to force you to do anything against your will. I have no intention of asserting my rights as your husband in a way obnoxious to you. Neither have I the intention of docilely accepting your decree of virtual separation between us. I ask that you forget the past and meet me with an open mind—allowing the man I now am to win you or lose you. As long as I am your husband in name, isn't it better that we should try to be husband and wife in spirit also? We must eventually

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become husband and wife in truth or not at all. I shall either have a wife or not have her. But I demand the chance to earn your respect and love and to let your charms quicken my affections. Outside of our own feelings is our duty to Vance—we could scarcely divide him."

"You would not—Oh God in Heaven!—you would not take Vance from me!" she shrieked.

"Not willingly." His voice was grimly pleasant. Again he held out his hand. "Come, Gail, you cannot deny my right to make amends for the past. I am simply asking for justice. Give it to me—don't force me into driving you to be fair."

She clutched the arms of the chair. A deadly pallor overspread her face. The law would give the son to the father. He was to hold this cudgel always over her head; first, to force her to be friends; then——

She sprang up, screamed wildly.

"But you can't! Vance is mine!—— You are not—not—not——" But the right words would not come—— "not—worthy—of—him——" It was scarcely more than a whisper.

"The other George may not have been, *I* am," was his reply. Humor illuminated his face again. "He agrees with me. He told me just now that he loves me better than anyone except his mama."

"Oh!" It was a heart-breaking cry. She buried her face against the chair-back, moaning pitifully.

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"Gail!" He bent over her. "My own dear girl! I didn't mean to hurt you so."

"It is true, he does love you," she moaned brokenly. "You—have me at—your—mercy——"

"You won't find me a hard bargainer, my wife. I ask only that we be friends in truly platonic fashion till I win or lose you. Perhaps with such a past I should be more humble and ask nothing. But I simply can't get the proper connection with that past to make it seem my responsibility to atone for it. But, zounds! I don't want you without your love." He twinkled again. "Really, you're not *my* wife. *I* didn't choose you. Nor did you choose this *me*. Let's begin all over again, dear."

She looked up at him curiously, trying to fathom what manner of man he really was. Beneath the gay banter of his smile she read purpose, an unflinching purpose that could indulge in laughter and badinage without swerving a hair's breadth. And, strangely, as she read his strength, her own failing strength revived. The game they were playing became something desirable in itself. She ignored the fact that he was not playing a game. To her fevered brain they became two skilled opponents, the only question to be settled between them the one of supremacy of skill.

As she still stared at him in contemplation the door opened and Vance entered.

"Excuse me," he apologized. "I thought you'd

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surely be through talking by this time." He sidled up to his "father."

"Did you truly mean you'd go riding with me, Papa? Oh!" clapping his hands at the affirmative shake of the head. "Oh! bully! What was it you called me?—partner? and it means?——"

"That you and I are to be pals—and that means that we're to stand by each other through thick and thin; that if we get down to our last dollar—or dime, perhaps—we'll share it. And with a smile, partner, always with a smile."

"Do you hear, Mama? Papa and I are to be pals! Oh! Oh!" jumping up and down in his joy.

"Yes, partner," repeated the man. "And your Mama and I are to be friends, good, true friends, who trust in each other's fairness and will play square by each other always——Isn't that right, Gail?"

She rose and held out her hand.

"Yes, friends," said she, and forced herself to smile.

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XI

THE atmosphere of the Riverside Drive house was charged with excitement. The housekeeper, a portly matron with iron-gray hair and double chin; the butler, portly and bald; the upstairs girls and the parlor-maid, near-pretty young things; the fat cook, Miss Lauder, the governess; Gregory, Bryan, and the other retainers of the household, all anxiously awaited the return of the master of the house. Gail's first impulse had been to discharge the whole retinue and replace them with servants that had never known the real Orcutt. She feared the quizzing eyes of their servitors more than those of friends. Experience had shown her that they were more discerning of trifles. The butler had once suggested, with much coughing and many digressions, that he knew a remedy that would painlessly remove the mole on the back of Mrs. Lorme's neck, the existence of which Gail had not known till then. Gregory had discovered that one of Vance's ears set a fraction lower than the other, a fact overlooked for five years by his mother. From recriminations during a quarrel between the cook

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and the parlor-maid, Gail had learned that the parlor-maid's eyes were green rather than blue and that the cook had "more hair on her face than a lady ought to have." Eyes open to details would find many little differences between the two men that had escaped her, carefully as she had studied them.

Second thought told her that, however great the risk, it must be taken. To discharge the old help in a body and engage new would arouse suspicion outside her walls that would not end till the truth —or something damagingly near it—had been reached. The newspapers were again giving their readers the Orcutt case in prominent headlines. Moralizing editorials were appearing The papers that seek to prejudice "mass" against "class" were sneering and scathingly wrathful over his recovery. Alienists, district attorney, public, all were arraigned and violently denounced for this latest "outrage." The joke-makers added their share, finding the "lost memory" and "double personality" rich material for their pens. So, too, the cartoonists. A financier just then in the public eye, a corporation head, the President, the Mayor, and lesser lights, disported themselves in caricatures labeled, "Another lost memory," "'Twas not *I*, dear Public, but my double!" etc.

She would take her chances with the servants, trusting them to invent their own explanations for whatever difference they discovered. Having

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invented an explanation, they would believe it against any and all proof to the contrary. She harked back to the talk she had had with Judge Allison—the pregnant talk upon which she had builded George Orcutt's escape. He had said that the charm of a mystery lies not in its actual solution, but in its vulnerability to innumerable solutions, and that a mind, especially the untrained mind, once inoculated with its own intoxicating "discovery," is immune to every other—professional deceivers having thrived through all the ages on this trait in human kind. To come upon an intricately woven partition, seemingly impenetrable, then—to find a secret opening through, or over, or under!—and by oneself! Joy in the marvelous achievement blinds the eyes to the ordinary gateway, though it be as high and wide as the sky itself.

She gave no information to her household save that Mr. Orcutt had recovered from his illness except for loss of memory of people and places, and that he was to return home. She refused to be interviewed by reporters. The newspaper information about the lost memory and double personality came from the sanatorium. And though this was of the most meagre sort, it afforded sufficient ammunition for the reporter. Books on double personality were quickly scanned and their contents used as material out of which to weave a marvelous psychological story, with George Orcutt as the central figure. The information was given out as

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though coming directly from Doctor Underwood. He did not dispute this, allowing both the public and Gail to believe that he had been correctly reported.

That Morris Underwood, noted for his penetration and canny wisdom, should mistake fiction for fact, inspired Gail with new courage. Her spirits rose with a bound that almost carried her doubts away, bringing her perilously near to the self-hypnotic state of belief that desire so often induces. She found herself smiling fearlessly at the gruff alienist as she bade him adieu.

Orcutt, for such we must call him, held the doctor's hand a long while in parting.

"You haven't seen the last of me," said he soberly, a note of affection in his voice that brought an answering gleam to the beady eyes behind the big spectacles. "I'm coming out to talk with you as often as you will let me. And you're to make our home your city headquarters, remember. I've told you all this before, and am simply emphasizing it now. I'm feeling very much at sea; you're my one landmark—don't desert me, Underwood."

"You can depend on me to see you through," replied the doctor, and his laugh held a deeper meaning than any of his hearers realized. He stepped back, smiled encouragingly at his ex-patient. Bryan moved the lever and the car shot down the driveway and out upon the road.

"We're off," cried Vance. "We're off for home,

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Papa." The child sat between the two on the wide back seat of the big car. Orcutt looked humorously over his head at Gail.

"We're off for somewhere; destination unknown, is as near as we can say it, isn't it?"

"Papa!" Vance caught an arm in both hands. "You're going *home*. And you and I are going riding in the morning. You haven't forgot that?" anxiously. "And you're going to stay home lots more'n you used to. You've promised me."

"And you say my horse has a white star in his forehead; I always like a horse with a white star in his forehead, if his legs are good," bantered the man.

"His legs?" Vance looked disturbed for a moment; then relievedly: "But you bought him, Papa; of course his legs are good. You told me once—the time I went riding with you before," proudly, "that you always knew a good nag even when you were a little boy. And that it was a remarkable thing for a city boy to know that."

"A city boy? Was I a city boy? I have a curious feeling that somehow the city and I are only speaking acquaintances. I should have said I was raised in the country. Where else did I learn about birds and insects, and berries and wild flowers and a mass of wood lore? The doctor and I never walked in the woods that I didn't surprise him with my intimate acquaintance with it and its habitants."

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He was speaking to himself, meditatively, his brow puckered in the painful task of trying to catch the elusive something that seemed always on the point of being caught, and always, at the seemingly crucial moment, evading him.

"You had a summer home on the Hudson," came Gail's voice, quickly. "And you attended a preparatory school at some little town in New Jersey—Leighton, I think."

"Why, Papa, don't you remember what you did when you were a little boy?"

"Dear, I told you that Papa had forgotten all about the things he used to do, and the people he used to know. I thought you understood."

"Yes; but I didn't know you meant he had forgotten the things he did when he was a boy. I don't see how he could forget—*that!*"

The man laughed so heartily that Gail's set lips relaxed to an almost merry smile. The day was conducive to lightness of spirits. The foliage along the roadway was gorgeously resplendent, reds and golds and burnished greens; the air was splendidly fresh and cool; the swift, motionless speed of the car along the smooth highway, intoxicating in the illusion it gave of being borne on wings through the air. It was impossible not to tingle with the fullness of living.

"You say you got my letter and have learned the names of the servants," she said. "I thought it would make it less confusing for you and for them."

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"Yes," he laughed. "It's a good thing I've grown accustomed to so many attendants at the hospital; otherwise the thought of those twenty servants would be more disquieting than you can imagine. I have a feeling that I've bossed a crowd of men around, but I can't seem to accept the fact of white-capped and obsequious females as being natural to me and my house. Did we always have so many maids?"

"Why, Papa!" Vance's voice was shrill with remonstrance. "You know we have. Why, Perkins said you could keep a hundred servants on the jump. And it was the maids you liked to wait on you always. They didn't, because—well, I don't know just why; I guess because they weren't engaged for that—they're very particular to do just what they're engaged to do——" sagely. "But——"

"Papa has forgotten, dear. And you keep forgetting about his lost memory." She looked straight at Orcutt for the first time that day. "I think it would be well not to speak too freely about the change you feel within yourself. It is not easy for others to accept the situation as it is. It is so strange that——"

"To make them see it straight it must be presented obliquely," he concluded, smiling. "I accept your advice. But we mustn't exclude the boy; he'll soon learn that his Papa is really two men. One spirit has occupied his body for a while and gone away, and the new spirit doesn't remember what

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the other spirit did. It's still Papa, but a different phase of him, a presentation Vance hasn't seen before."

"Oh! that's why you're so much nicer," cried the boy. "This—spirit understands a boy better or—something. You were always pretty nice, but now you're bully. But—I—wish—this spirit didn't use such big words."

The man laughed, though again unsatisfied questioning appeared in his eyes.

"I thought I was a very unpretentious speaker, Vance. I'll remember and simplify my vocabulary."

"There you go again!" The child was seriously disapproving. "You use bigger words than Mama. The other—spirit didn't. And I liked it. It's tiresome to stop all the time and have words explained, and 'less they are explained I don't know exac'ly what's meant, and I like to know exac'ly."

"But that's the way you learn," expostulated his mother. She again looked fully at Orcutt. "I have never talked down to him; I don't believe in it." Her look said "and you must not." He did not answer, but a humorous twist of the lips made her think he would do as he pleased in the matter.

The car stopped.

"Home!" cried Vance.

The man looked quickly at the imposing stone structure. "Home?" he said blankly. "Home?"

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XII

"HOME?"

Orcutt repeated the word again a few hours later. He stood in George Orcutt's room by the mantel, an elaborately carved mantel of Bacchantes in marble. Over his head, disporting themselves against a background of soft blue, were other graceful nymphs, done by the master-hand of the man Orcutt had killed. Still others of ivory and of bronze stood on pedestals and brackets; and these were but a beginning. The walls were covered with pictures of female beauty, scantily draped, if at all. Scenes of reveling maidens were painted on the head and the foot-boards of the great canopied bed; the canopy was embroidered with laughing sprites. A rare tapestried screen added other ravishing visions.

More than all Gail's words the room told him what sort of man the "other George Orcutt" was—the man he believed himself to have been. He stood there, faint with a strange nausea, sickened as is one with the stenching perfume of a closed roomful of strongly fragrant flowers. There was nothing in statue or painting or tapestry that was offensive in itself. Any one or any half-dozen of the por-

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trayed nymphs might acceptably grace the room. It was the insistence on the one side of art, the harping on the one theme, the excessive numbers of the one subject that betrayed the warped mind of its possessor. The emphasis was on woman, and not on art. It was art solely for the sake of revealing woman, her beauties and seductiveness. There was no pretence at disguising the ruling sentiment—art was merely a tool for the glorification of female nudity. The possession of millions had made the possession of real art productions possible; but no observer could doubt that a penniless George Orcutt would have had his room crowded with presentations of the same subject, let them be tawdry lithographs or prints or whatnot, and however cheap and glaringly inartistic.

Nor was his room all that caused his sickening sense of disappointment and his feeling of oppression. The whole house appeared crowded to him, overburdened with furniture and rugs and endless works of art. He admitted that it was harmonious in color and arrangement, but it did not bring the "home" feeling to him. He felt rebellious against it and the ceremonious servants and the formalities of the dinner table. He felt alien to the house and everything in it, and wondered how he was to adjust himself to an environment that, however old, persisted in seeming new. In the midst of his meditations, Jackson, the butler, appeared. He carried a salver holding a decanter and glass.

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"I've brought yuh some apricot brandy, sah. You never was overfond of wine, an' I noticed yuh didn't drink any at dinner, sah. Brandy was always yuh favorite—yuh ordered this jist before yuh was ill."

"Wait!" Orcutt stayed him as he lifted the decanter. "You've been with us a long while—how long, Jackson?"

"About twenty years. I came to your fathah when I was eighteen and you twelve. And I came to you and Mis' Orcutt when you was married, sah."

"Do you find me greatly changed, Jackson? The truth now. I am so changed in my feelings and my views on things I want to know how I seem to you who have known me for years."

"Well, yuh look a little different, sah," said the man cautiously. He was a mulatto, with little look of the negro in his features, and with a shrewdness and natural intelligence recognized by his employers and the other help, all white. That and his long years of service in the Orcutt family made him the virtual head of the serving force.

"How?"

The man hesitated.

"Yuh ain't been drinkin' hard foh a long time—p'raps it's just that you look sober, sah."

"So you're bringing me some brandy to see if you can make me look natural, eh? I'll cut out all liquor for a while, Jackson. Come, tell me how I am different."

"That's your forehead an' your hair an' beard

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an' body, sah; but the nose seems smaller, the swellin' gone down more'n likely. But the expression of the eyes an' the laugh an' the speech, sah, are considerable different, considerable, sah."

"But why should they be?" questioned the other irritably.

Jackson cleared his throat.

"I think the answer to that is simply, sah, that it always happens."

"Always? You mean the times that I've been like this before?"

"No, sah. I never saw you like this before. But it happens to all the other persons who have a double personality. The outward man always changes along with the inner one, sah. 'As a man thinks,' the Bible has it, sah."

Orcutt shook his head, somewhat belligerently.

"But why haven't you seen me this way before? For I must have been, some time during the twenty years you've lived with us, to have learned the things I know now and didn't know before—by all accounts."

"Yes, sah, you have been; only——"

"Go on!" impatiently.

"We've not been fair to you, Mistah George," said Jackson, a faint huskiness in his throat. "No, sah; we suhtainly have not. The times you were away, sah, we always thought——"

"The times I was away! Ah! And those, Jackson? How often? When? Where did I go?"

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"That's just it. No one evah knew where you went, sah; yuh would disappear foh weeks at a stretch, and we all thought——" He coughed, deprecatingly. "Well, sah, we didn't think you were reading scientific books and doing serious study, sah."

"And I was."

"Yes, sah, you were a-doing that very same. We all owe you considerable apology, Mistah George."

Orcutt tapped his fingers against the mantel shelf.

"Away from home for weeks at a stretch," he mused. "About how many times, Jackson? And how long were the periods between my disappearances, would you say?"

Jackson meditated a little.

"You disappeared several times a year, sah, for the past ten years."

"And everybody thought I was on a debauch and let me alone," said Orcutt. "So now nobody knows where I was."

Jackson bowed acquiescence.

"No, sah, nobody knows. But yuh were busy with some mighty interesting things, I see now, Mistah George. I overheard you talking about books and things at the dinner table," he explained. "You were a very busy man while you were away those times, and I think a—uh——"

"Decent one," completed Orcutt.

"Yes, sah. But it's always that way—one good personality, and one—uh—one not so good, sah."

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"You seem well versed on the subject of dual personalities, Jackson. I see that some of the newspapers claim I'm faking. If so, I'm doing it pretty well—eh?"

Jackson chuckled.

"You could always see the funny side o' things; you're like your old self that way, sah."

"My old self——" Orcutt took up the word. "That old self is a stranger to me, Jackson, and this new self somewhat of a stranger to you, I suppose?" he laughed.

"Yes and no, sah. You're different, of course, sah. But I expected you would be."

Orcutt straightened up.

"Look here. I'm not faking. Get that out of your head, Jackson."

"You misunderstood me, Mistah George," returned Jackson, with dignity. "According t' the books on double personality, *two* personalities are *two* personalities, whether they're in two bodies or in one body, sah, and it's natural to expect to find two men more unlike than like, sah."

"So I'm all right, according to the rules," grinned Orcutt. "I'm glad I'm all right according to something, for to myself I'm about the queerest fish in five seas."

"You'll get used to yuhself after a little, Mistah George," consoled Jackson. "And we-all will get used to you. The new self is—uh—a mighty likable sort, sah."

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Orcutt laughed, a boyish laugh of pleasure.

"Thank you, Jackson. No, no brandy, and nothing more for to-night."

"Good-night, Mistah George," returned the man, departing.

"Wait!"

Orcutt held a book in his hand.

"Jackson, 'George W. Orcutt' is written on this fly-leaf. This isn't my writing."

Jackson eyed the sprawling hieroglyphics.

"I take it, sah, that you write a close, fine hand, very legible. Isn't that right, sah?" he queried, a triumphant smile hovering on his lips.

"Hm!" chuckled Orcutt. "So that may happen, too! You've gone pretty deep into double personality, I see, so I'll take your word for it that I'm the simon-pure article. I'm waiting to study it first-hand in myself."

Jackson chuckled in answer.

"It's suhtainly funny, but each personality seems always t' scorn the other one, sah. No matter how one personality does a thing, it's a good guess that the other'll do it just the opposite."

Orcutt looked at the title after Jackson left. *La Bête Humaine,* he read, and flung the book savagely to the floor.

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XIII

JACKSON took his way to the servants' dining-room. There was the same clatter of tongues as when he left. Gregory's voice reached him as he entered the lower hall.

"Double personality! Huh! It's just a case of a drunk Orcutt and a sober Orcutt. Seven months on the water wagon has made a man of 'im. Of course, he looks different; the bloat's gone down and his flabby muscles has tightened. I was on a bat once for a week, an' when I was sobering up I caught sight of myself in the mirror an' mistook my bleary red mug for a burglar's an' struck out my fist and smashed the mirror to bits."

"The mirror! Hivins! Shure an' it was bad luck it must have brought ye!"

"No, Kitty, bad luck to the brewers: I've been sober ever since."

"But the doctor says it's double personality," said Lottie, the parlor-maid. "Mary and I've been reading up on it, and it's straight goods that it can happen; and it fits Mr. Orcutt's case exactly. Just a change from drunk to sober wouldn't account for

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his forgetting about everything he ever did and everybody he ever knew, would it?" with asperity.

"It might," laughed Bryan. "If forgetting would account for the fact that he killed a man. But it won't. The double personality stunt does the trick—so, it's double personality, thickhead."

"You think he's faking?"

A yowl of derision arose.

"'Ear! 'ear!" cried the footman. "She arsks if he's a-fakin'."

"Just a moment," interrupted Jackson pleasantly, appearing from the shadowed doorway. "I've known Mistah Orcutt foh twenty years. I knew him when he was a boy and I knew his father and his mother before him. No matter what else he is, he's honest. It's in the blood to speak and act straight from the shoulder. If he'd been one of the sly kind he could of lived just as he did and had the respect of his wife and household at the same time. 'Assume a virtue if you have it not,' was not Mistah Orcutt's way. No; take my word foh it, he's not fakin'. I've known him when he was sober, as a child and boy, an' it's not just that he's sober that makes the difference we see now. It's no argument against it to say that we never knew of a case of dual personality. If there wasn't anything in the world but what we know about 'twould be more interestin' to leave this life an' take our chances on——"

"Hell fire and brimstone," chortled Bryan.

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"That's the idea, though not exactly what I was goin' to say. Mistah Orcutt is as much puzzled over the change in himself as we are. And the change goes deeper than just his looks an' manners. He says he shan't keep a valet! And he's sore on his rooms! We're goin' to see new differences every day. It's just as the psychologists say—two men in one body. An' the sooner we forget the man we knew an' get acquainted with the ways of the man that's upstairs now, the better he'll like it, I'm thinkin'."

"Now, yez ar-re talkin'," returned the cook. "An' by phwat yez all say I'm glad it's this side of him an' not the other I'm buckin' me head into. If he plays fair by the madam I shouldn't think it would make any difference at all, at all, how the change came about. I'll be dommed if I'd cook for a man that'd leave her for some hussy. She's a lady, which all the high cracky dames ain't, and ye can believe me! An' she's han'some, which is phwat more of 'em ain't, an' ye can believe that, too! An' it's no disputin' me I think ye'll be doin'."

"To-night's the first dinner I ever knew him to eat here, and I've been here three years," snickered the up-stairs girl. "So you wouldn't had to cook much for him like he was before. And he didn't sleep here more'n once a month."

"There was just one stage he struck," Bryan laughed, "when he would make us bring him home

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or fight. If we took him to his rooms at the Buckley he'd smash the furniture an' yell like a pirate."

"We?" snorted the cook. "An' does yez mean you an' some hussy?"

"His man. Where is Perkins now, Greg? Didn't you say you saw him lately?"

"He's with old Biddington; was, a month ago."

Bryan rose, still laughing.

"I had a reversible coat once, black on one side an' tan on the other. Didn't take the tan side long to get grimy-looking—the black streaked through from the other side whenever it got wet."

"An' yez thinks this Orcutt'll show pretty much the same color of the old Orcutt whin he starts in boozin', and it's thinkin' the same I am meself," said the cook.

"Mistah Orcutt isn't drinkin' now. He gave orders not to serve him with any liquor whatever," announced Jackson, loftily.

"Hell!" Bryan's face was blank with amazement. "Well, anyhow, it's the same Orcutt; sooner or later his spots'll show through."

Jackson resumed authority.

"Our business, I'm thinkin', is to *serve* Mistah Orcutt," said he.

A figure glided swiftly from a recess hid by a curtain outside the room and out of range of the door. It was Gail. She had played eavesdropper. There had been no other way. She must know what was being said in the world downstairs. She must

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know what was going on behind the inscrutable faces that would tell her nothing, not even by the glimmer of an eye. She sat down in her room and uttered a sigh of relief that was almost a sob. Bryan's "Well, anyhow, it's the same Orcutt," was a truth so evident that he used it to prove his conclusion. No matter what else they might suspect, it would not be the reality. The man up-stairs was to them George Orcutt, no matter now what he said or did, nor how he looked or acted. She went to bed and to sleep. To-morrow might bring its anxieties, but to-night she should rest unafraid.

Orcutt went to bed, but not at once to sleep, and not under the canopy embroidered with dancing houris. He had installed himself and personal effects in another suite, turning his back in disgust on the nymphs and Bacchantes. He could not accept the past that those rooms thrust so avowedly upon him. And he had begun to question his own explanation for the change in himself. Hour after hour he lay and tried to find a solution that would now satisfy his mind. Why had he no recollection of previous occurrences of his personality? In the cases of double personality on record there was unity within each personality at least. It was not strange that number two, as he termed his present personality, did not recollect anything about number one, the "other George," but surely it should have some memory of its own previous occurrences. And why had Jackson never seen him before as number two,

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but always as number one? And why had Gail never known him as he was now? Why——?

But he turned over to sleep with a disgruntled groan:

"Whether I feel the part or not, I am George Orcutt. There's no question as to that. At some stage of my life I've been a beast, and the sooner I accept the disgusting truth the better. Only——"

But the curtain had rung down on a sleeping household, as tranquil as though the drama had ended rather than just begun.

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XIV

VANCE clapped his hands and laughed gleefully, a performance he had done many times the past hour. His "papa" had just tied a last glittering ornament on the topmost spray of the Christmas tree, which now stood fully bedecked with tinsel and burnishings and many-colored electric bulbs.

"Now for the presents," cried the boy, his childish treble shrill with excitement. "I've got all the little ones piled together for the top branches, and I'm going to climb up and tie 'em on."

"Let Papa tie those, Vance; you tie the ones on the lower branches."

"But I like the climbing up and leaning over to reach the places—it's not just the tying 'em on——" cried the boy.

"Would you like to fall and hurt yourself?"

"No; but he likes to feel he might fall and hurt himself, break an arm or leg—and then *not* fall," said Orcutt, with a laugh.

The man and the boy looked at each other and both twinkled with a mirthful understanding between them. The child's head was thrown slightly

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back, his slight figure in its white serge suit held with the dignity of a general, his already flushed face kindling with a new delight. He turned to his mother.

"Papa knows because he was a boy once himself. He always knows," he continued. "Women know how girls feel 'bout things, I guess, but they just never know exac'ly how a boy feels." His tone was aggrieved. "And they always say to a boy, '*You* don't want to do *that*'—just as though *they* know what he wants to do!"

"Condemned by a jury of my peers!" Gail's laugh was as gay as a bird's trill. "All right, Vance. But let me warn you that a broken arm feels worse than the mumps. I know, I've had both."

"But I won't break my arm," he answered stoutly. "The fun's in not breaking it, like Papa says."

"*As* Papa says."

"As Papa says," he repeated docilely. "As—Papa—says," trying to impress the correction on his memory as he had been taught. "Now, Papa! the presents! the presents!"

There were packages of various sizes and shapes, two big hampers full, all now of one identity in their white tissue and holly ribbons. There were presents for each other, presents for every one that served them in the house and outside of it, and for many of the relatives of these, presents for the Lormes and other friends who were to come next morning to help them celebrate the first family

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Christmas tree of the George Orcutt household. There had always been presents for the help, lavish distributions of money by the master of the house, and appropriate gifts of ornaments and apparel by Vance and his Mama. And there had always been a tree for the child in the play-room, as beautiful as it could be fashioned. Christmas had been kept always as regarded its letter, but its exuberant spirit had not before found a place there. The wife's pride had not allowed her to have a family tree with the head of the family so prominently absent. She could not blind herself to its irony.

More ironical yet was the present situation. But not to Gail's present seeming. The "tragedy queen" had given place once more to the "dryad." Her Latin inheritance of blood was upon her—an excessive buoyancy that made her oblivious to all but the joys of the hour. She had been thus for three months, since the day of Orcutt's homecoming. Free from the suspicions of the servants that she had dreaded; free from Doctor Underwood's suspicions—as she believed; the new Orcutt accepted complacently, even if curiously, by friends and acquaintances; Vance happy beyond words; and the man playing his rôle of friend to the letter! —all this provided an anæsthesia that quieted her fears. As people in the throes of war and disaster throw themselves with abnormal abandon into ephemeral gaieties, so did Gail turn her back for

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the nonce on her anxieties and avidly embrace the feast the gods in a lenient mood had allowed her.

She had never known a man like this one; she had not even known that such existed. It had been her rather vague belief that a man who was interested in the mysteries of the universe and in problems beyond the simplest additions and subtractions that life presents, was necessarily old, or fusty, or intolerant of ordinary intellects, and excessively tiresome to live with. The capacity to converse lightly on art and music, the drama and works of current fiction, and to have opinions on religion, had seemed to her heretofore to betray a wide culture and all the knowledge that was really worth while for people who were not "queer."

She had been at first bewildered by his conversation, conversation not meant to instruct her, but to pass the time between them that he insisted they should spend together, so many hours each day. He talked about the things he knew best, the knowledge of which had cut so deep into his brain that their tracks had withstood the shock that obliterated all memory of purely personal experiences. It was seemingly no more natural for him to breathe than to discuss the whys and wherefores of life and the underpinnings of the world that harbored him. It was his matter-of-course way of interjecting profundities into the conversation, and his pervasive humor, and a delightful boyish spontaneity of expression that made it possible for his interest in his

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subjects and something of their tenor to "get across" to Gail. In the beginning she was too much in doubt of her understanding to answer; soon she had shyly questioned; then she had secretly bought books—books on sociology, psychology, philosophy —and read them, to her confusion more often than enlightenment. But she gleaned sufficient acquaintance with the new words and phrases to embolden her into discussion—one-sided arguments in which he bantered, and challenged, and laughed at her, yet meanwhile clarifying the subject under consideration with simplified explanations that she could not fail to comprehend in some degree.

It was largely her excited delight in these novel excursions of thought that blinded her to the dangers of the intimacy they brought. Philosophy and science seemed such safe, impersonal subjects. And it was such a new and wholly delightful sensation to use her thinking powers that she was absorbed in the very novelty of it. She basked in the warmth of this strange and most entrancing friendship, without stopping to ask where it was leading them.

She had grown to think of him as a relative, as one who belonged by right to the family. He was Vance's father, not in the flesh, but in spirit. The curious sensation that she had felt when Vance first called him "Papa" had passed. He was her boy's godfather—had come to be her attitude of mind. And "Papa," said by the child, held a wholly different content for her than its correlate "Mama."

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But Vance had said the two pregnant words so many times this Christmas evening, had included them together so closely in his holiday spirit of happiness, that even she, knowing the truth, believed almost that the three were one family.

It was as though *he* had always been there—— And would always be there. He surrounded her and Vance with such an atmosphere of being cared for, was so chivalrously protective! George Orcutt's neglect had made her peculiarly appreciative of this other man's courteous attentions. And they were given so unconsciously, as though not to serve her would be the unnatural thing. The mask of coldness under which she had hid her misery as George Orcutt's wife had wholly melted away under the new Orcutt's deference and homage.

And she had paraded him before her world with a pathetic pride in his possession—a husband who honored her and of whom she was not ashamed! Joy in this revelation had mingled with even her first fear of discovery. Which fear was groundless, she soon found. Her world had known George Orcutt only as a name and a position which his wife bore for him. The golden-brown Vandyke of this man placed him satisfactorily in society's eyes—the one distinctive thing it had ever remarked about him; that, and the fact that he was always intoxicated.

She had found, also, that society, tradespeople, friends, every one—save the new Orcutt himself and some of the servants who held to the theory of a

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double personality—accounted for the change in him on the ground of his now being sober. And her dread that his broad knowledge would arouse suspicions was quickly allayed. He had not displayed his erudition to her social friends. He was singularly silent. He conversed at length only with her and Doctor Underwood, a matter that delighted her personally, even outside the question of his betraying himself. That he should talk to her as an intellectual equal and not merely as a woman to be prattled to!—she was as vain over this as a peacock, and laughed to herself over her vanity.

These things were in her mind as she helped to dress the Christmas tree—a treat that Vance had insisted that only himself and his Papa and Mama should have.

"The presents are all on," the child cried. "Now, Papa, a romp! Let's see if I can climb up to your shoulder hand over hand."

Gail fingered the holly in her hair and smiled tenderly. How beautifully he helped Vance without the child's knowing it.

"There!" The man swung the little figure in the air, then set him on his feet, and pressed the call-bell for his governess to come and take him to bed.

Gail waited to arrange Vance's presents, the man drawing them forth from their hiding-places. She stood a moment and looked the tree over, then held out her hand to Orcutt.

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"'What I want is right here.'"—*Page 105*

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"Good night. I have still a few things in my room to get ready." She assumed the air of mystery that had been Vance's for the past week and whispered, "For—you."

"What I want is right here," said he, and took her in his arms and kissed her.

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XV

IT was so unexpected that for a moment she lay unresisting against his breast, receiving passively the kisses that showered her lips.

Even when free of his clasp she could only stare at him in a sort of daze, and regret rather than wrath was in her low voice.

"You have broken our agreement—Oh! why did you!"

"Why? You are my wife, and I love you."

"But I do not look on you as a husband and I do not love you."

"Gail! Don't say that! Why for these three months we have been——"

"Three months!" she cried, forcing scorn into her voice. "You expect three months' decency to drown out of my memory seven years of humiliation, of the most brutal neglect!"

The man walked the floor for a few moments, stopped abruptly beside her.

"I know nothing of those seven years. Am I to be punished forever for the wrongs that I did not commit?"

She was speechless, her eyes fell before his, a

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deadly nausea seized her—it seemed to her that she could not again lay George Orcutt's sins upon him.

"Stop shivering, Gail. I will not touch you." He spoke roughly, then his voice softened. "Forgive me! I forgot that you yet have your memories, that you cannot so easily dissociate me from my past. Zounds! it's all a muddle. To save me I can't but feel that I don't deserve your scorn—Oh, I do—I realize it when I study my past record—only, I can't quite believe it's *my* past record—that's the damnable part of it all."

He took another turn about the room, again stopped beside her.

"It's not my present self, but the past that stands between us, the other George—yes, dear?"

"It's the other George," she mumbled. "He stands between us—and always will. *And always will——*"

"No! As soon as you don't want him to he won't. Your pride won't let you offset seven years of neglect with a paltry three months of devotion. You aren't sure, that's it. You're afraid this George will go into retirement and the other George reappear. You're ashamed of having loved me once—you don't want to be ashamed again. Isn't that it, my wife?"

She laughed shakily. It was always some one else who found the best explanation for her conduct.

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"I only know that I'm afraid," she answered truly. "I was beginning to trust you, and now——"

"I've broken out of my traces and you're afraid I won't go back into harness again. But I will—for a while. I can't promise how long. You're my wife—I'm mad with love for you—it's inevitable that sometime—— But we'll be friends as before, dear. Come, shake hands as you intended."

The face she turned to him was ghastly.

"It's the end. I can't be friends with that hanging over me. I must go away. I leave it to your fairness—about—Vance. He's my baby—you—you will let me have him half the time—— Oh! you will, surely you will!"

His eyes were bewildered. Then he smiled pityingly.

"Why, Gail, dear! I shall not force you to my arms, my wife. I'm not a brute, whatever the other George may have been. Come, forget what has happened. We are good friends, and shall be only friends till you want us to be husband and wife again."

"No, I must go away," she uttered in deliberate voice. "I can never be more than friend. But you will not believe—you will not care at last what I want—it will be yourself—I know now that you are like all men. I have been blind—you—seemed—different——"

He pushed a chair toward her.

"Sit down," he commanded gently. "Now,

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Gail, try and tell me what your terror means—for it is terror, and to me out of all proportion to any explanation you have given me. For three months we have been daily companions, good comrades, joyous as six-year-olds. Nor was it friendship that caused our happiness. It was love, Gail, love!"

"No!" The words were carefully chosen. "It was not love—I loathe you."

It was the man's face now that was gray. He passed his hands feebly over his eyes, blinded by his sudden misery. A moment, then a grimly sardonic smile curled his lips.

"Let me congratulate you on your perfect acting," he said curtly, but with a note of jagged pain. "I really believed that you enjoyed my society—I thought that you wanted to be in my arms as much as I wanted to have you there. Forgive me." He bowed gravely. "And good-by. I shall leave the house after the Christmas festivities in the morning."

"No! You must not go. I must pay, not you!"

"Pay? For what? For making me think you loved me?" A play of humor mingled with the glaze of pain in his eyes. "And why should you pay for my stupidity, an asininity that could mistake—loathing for love?"

She sprang up.

"No! No! I lied. I do not loathe you. I—like—you."

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She stood like a child, wistful, wanting forgiveness, yet tremblingly afraid. He regarded her soberly.

"I'm afraid you did not lie, my wife. Your terror bespeaks loathing more than—liking, I fear. Anyhow, I make you unhappy. And it's been no easy matter for me to stay quietly here. This life of inactivity doesn't suit me. Zounds! I feel like a caged lion. . . . You see, I've been so mad over you that I was willing to be caged to be near you, to see you—to win you. But you say I can never win you, that I must always stay at arm's length. So, it is better good-by now, isn't it?"

"And you would go—where?" she whispered.

"I think I shall go first to Colorado and see Father's relatives. I should like to find out more about my family than you seem able to tell me. Jackson says that Aunt Maria was with us during most of my boyhood—— Surely, she could throw some light on the very mysterious change in myself."

She gripped the chair's back.

"Vance," she mumbled. "It would—break his heart for you to leave—now. The doctor thinks that he will have to be operated on for his throat—— He would want you here——"

He folded his arms and stood in meditation.

"No," he uttered at length. "I can't stay. Actions speak louder than words, and your terror of me is not compatible with—liking. If my touch is

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so repugnant to you that you would give up Vance for half the time rather than endure it, I should be a monster to stay on here and keep you in daily dread of another outbreak."

"But if we could be just friends——"

"I couldn't, Gail, not for long. If we were a young man and a young woman with no tie between us, I could, even to the fourteen years that Jacob served for Rachel. But you are my wife, you are the mother of my child. Knowing this and loving you as I do——"

"But when you know I—don't want—you——"

He laughed grimly.

"Your portrayal of friend is rather misleading. I'm afraid I shouldn't know any better another time what *you* want, Gail. With due allowance for egotism, and for my own love and desire blinding me, I should yet have sworn it was love I saw in your eyes—not loathing, not liking—but love! and again and again. My patience—for so it seems to me—was occasioned by fear of myself, not of your reception of my caresses. Wait! you misunderstand. Not fear of my affection for you, but fear that—— Yes, Gail, that this 'I' should give place to the other personality, the George that had hurt you. I waited to test myself, to try to be sure that I should not again betray your faith."

She stared up at him in a sort of horror. She had been envying him his peace of mind while he

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was silently groaning and writhing under the revolting past she had fastened upon him!

His brooding gravity gave place to sudden mirth.

"Gail, the other George should make me shudder, but frankly he's too unreal for me to take seriously. His amusements, his friends, his ladies—I can no more believe that they ever interested any phase of me than that the sun is inhabited. Muddled as everything is I yet know that that George will never 'come back.'"

"You have seen—them?"

"All." He smiled humorously. "So Kessell tells me, and he seems to have been very much in the other George's confidence. Dear, it couldn't have been that I neglected you for them." He suddenly changed to gravity again. "Ah! no wonder you loathe me, believing that I—— But no! it wasn't I—you know that—— Oh God! this mystery!"

He held out his hand.

"Let it be good-by now, Gail. I'll slip off in the morning while Vance's busy with his presents."

"You won't leave—Vance——"

"A child forgets quickly."

"But——"

"Stop! You ask me to chain my emotions, stay like a muzzled dog by the side of a wife that shudders if I touch her!" His eyes met hers squarely. "I'm not the sort to take a kick and grovel for another."

She swayed unsteadily. He must not go to Col-

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orado. Aunt Maria was not of a disposition to tolerate a mystery. In some way she would discover the truth. She knew every feature, every distinctive mark, every blemish and beauty of body of the real George Orcutt. She would not be satisfied with hypotheses nor enraptured with her own nor any one's else explanation unless it really explained. No, he must not go. Yet—could she deceive him again, play with his affections?

Yes; for already she heard her voice making sweetly appealing sounds!

"I don't want you to go—I, too, have been happy these three months—it is only that I can't yet forget and am afraid. For—my sake—won't you stay and be friends a while longer——"

"Gail! Gail!" His voice was rapturous. "We will be only friends, dear, till you do believe in me. And you must believe in *me*—— There is no other George Orcutt, beloved. *I* am your husband, the image you hold was an interloper. Please, dear, say 'George, I——'" He stopped. "Gail, you have never called me 'George.' Why?"

"Because I called *him* that," she cried impulsively.

He laughed, with boyish happiness.

"I must have a name, dear. A name from you will make a priceless Christmas present." He bent over her. "What shall you call *me,* my wife?"

"Friend," she answered soberly.

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"Friend? I don't need a constant reminder of our pact, Gail!"

She looked steadily into his grieved eyes.

"Please let me call you 'friend,'" she said wistfully. "More than husband or lover or anything else in the world, I need a friend."

There was no acting now. She was pathetically in earnest. She held out her hand.

"Good night, Friend."

"Good night, my wife," he answered simply.

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XVI

IT was two weeks later. Doctor Underwood was visiting Orcutt in his room, a common occurrence. The doctor partly reclined on a wide leather couch, his elbow jabbed in a pillow supporting his head, feet on the floor. His host sat near in a leather rocker, sunk heavily to its soft depths. Both were smoking.

"So, that's why I didn't get the Psyche I hinted for so diligently for Christmas? And why you have closed your old rooms and occupy these instead? You feel that those things are not yours to disturb nor give away. Um-m!"

The alienist chuckled during this commentary, but his keen eyes behind the broad spectacles were bright with anticipation, his nostrils quivered like a beagle hound's on a scent.

The younger man's face behind the thick smoke of his cigar held a rueful smile.

"I've said the 'other George' so often that I've grown possessed of an uncanny feeling that he's objective—a person outside this carcass of mine. Zounds!—Underwood, I never write my name to

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a check that something doesn't pull so hard from the inside of me that I feel like a forger. Houses, servants, all this rank luxury, seem the other George Orcutt's, not mine. To save my buttons I can't get the feel of ownership."

"Um-m! And your wife and child?"

"Gail? Vance?" His brows knit. Then he laughed, a low rumble of mirth peculiar to him. "They're mine. And only mine, Underwood. The feeling of ownership is good and strong there. But Gail's *my* wife, Vance's *my* child, through and by myself, not as an inheritance from the other George. Which shows the absurdity of my emotional attitudinizing. I feel that the pictured harem across the hall is the other George's and that I have no right to disturb it. I also feel that Gail's my wife and never has and never could have belonged to that beast."

The doctor twinkled till the rolls of fat underneath almost hid his eyes.

"Beast—eh? That's the way you speak of yourself?"

"Myself?" With quick wrath. "That libertine never inhabited—— Oh the devil! Can't I stop the lunacy of disowning my own past!"

The alienist raised himself from his pillow and sat upright.

"There is no absurdity, Orcutt, in your feeling of ownership of your wife and child and of nothing else. It is simply, that of all the possessions of

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the other 'you,' your wife and child are all that the 'you' of to-day would voluntarily choose."

"For heaven's sake, say the other George; the other 'you' seems too personal. I have a certain respect for my body; it's obnoxious to think it's a common possession of myself and a blackguard."

"It is not just the body one might expect to receive from a debauchee," returned the physician with seeming carelessness. "Muscular, symmetrical, healthful, it's the sort one might inherit from an outdoors man of simple tastes and habits."

The other man shook the ashes viciously from his cigar.

"It's all a rotten muddle! Outdoors man? Underwood, that's what I am. House life is getting on my nerves. I'll close the door on George Orcutt's past some day as I have on that room and cut for the open."

"And Mrs. Orcutt?—shall you leave or take her?"

"You old quizzer! Why does it always seem to interest you so greatly how I get along with my wife? Well, for once I shall answer you. My wife is hysterically afraid of me. I kissed her Christmas eve and she was in a blue funk of terror, threatened to leave the house forever if I as much as laid a finger on her again, sentimentally, that is."

The doctor's huge body jerked itself up from the sofa where it was again reclining.

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"You mean Christmas eve was the first time you kissed her?"

"And the last, probably. Despite my insistent belief in my respectability the fact remains that my body has housed a homicide and all-round rake. Unfortunately, my wife hasn't lost her memory."

"Then make her lose it," commanded the physician. "If she's your wife then let her be your wife."

"Easier said than done with a wife that shudders at the approach of my caresses as a gazelle might at a gorilla's! . . . . Gorilla?—Gorilla?" he repeated slowly. "Go-ril-la?"

He trembled violently, sprang to his feet, stood clutching the air.

"Underwood, help me to remember," he entreated piteously, turning dazed eyes on his friend. "Ah!" half falling to his chair. "It's gone—the door closed before—I—could—look—in."

"What door?" The alienist's quiet voice hid a palpitating excitement.

"Memory's door. It seemed for an instant that something—great—was going to happen."

"Something great has happened; memory has stirred," muttered the alienist under his breath.

"Underwood," came in sharp tones, "why should that particular word have been a touchstone?—or seemed for the moment to be?"

"God knows!" returned the alienist. "I'm only a doctor. You might make a study of gorillas; they're

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interesting in themselves. By the way, have you found me a picture of yourself before your illness?"

With brows still drawn with labored thought Orcutt opened a drawer of the desk by which he sat and handed out a pasteboard box.

"A boxful. I ran across them in the storeroom Wednesday while looking for a mechanical toy Vance wanted and thought was there. The other George liked to pose before the camera. I don't. The usual consistent difference, you see."

The alienist gave him a quick glance, then attacked the photographs and left him to his own thoughts. His method with his patient was indirection. He carefully nursed all his mental gropings while apparently insensible of them; and he refrained from interjecting into the conversation his own ideas on the subject ever uppermost in Orcutt's mind—the mysterious change in himself. He was a man as well as alienist and he knew that Orcutt needed a friend to bare his troubled thoughts to, and that as friend he could learn much more of the workings of his mind than he could as a specialist professionally viewing him in the light of a "study."

"Gone!" he heard Orcutt exclaim dejectedly. Then heard him rise and walk restlessly from object to object in the room.

With the exclamation Orcutt temporarily discontinued rapping upon memory's closed door. He was thinking of his wife. Since their renewed pact of friendship she had been as gracious and gay as be-

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fore, only it was a simulated gaiety, a graciousness measured exactly to the need of the occasion. Fear of him lay just beneath her friendliness, its palpitations never allayed sufficiently for her eyes to meet his in the careless joyousness of the past months. The belief constantly intruded itself that she was dextrously baiting him, releasing her sweetness only to a length where she could recover it with a slight effort—yet releasing it enough to keep him hovering near. Why, he asked himself again and again, did she trouble herself to keep such an evidently burdensome person around? If egotism had deluded him into thinking hitherto that her eyes were love-laden, it did not so delude him now. He had grown skeptical of any feeling she displayed toward him except fear.

And he loved her so fully—her curving slenderness, her smile of witchery, her unfathomable eyes, her melodic voice, the mobile mind, the wit that sparred so nimbly, the motherly solicitations over his son, the exquisite femininity of her lovely, graceful person—every attribute of body and of mind was simply adorable to him. He had tasted Paradise when he held her to his heart and kissed her. If he were given the choice of the gifts of the universe it would be his wife's love he would demand. And she shuddered at his touch! shuddered as though he were a hissing rattler! And he could not bring the "other George's" past near enough home to feel that it stood between them. He was

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entirely himself, the other George so alien, that he was impelled to the distasteful conclusion that it was he, himself, now, that was repugnant to her. He loved her and she loathed him!

His miserable cogitations were interrupted by the doctor's terse:

"Does Mrs. Orcutt know that you have these photographs?"

"No," he returned drily. "It's not good form to do anything for oneself here. I should have sent a lackey to get Vance's toy."

"She said there was no picture of her husband in the house." The doctor's voice was carefully uncritical.

"Yes," absently.

"Then she couldn't have known these were in the storeroom?"

"No, of course. She has ordered them destroyed and Jackson—I am sure it was Jackson—has saved them. He has been in the family a long while and has the old retainer's devotion to even a black sheep. Then he seems to have a mania for ticketing things. That storeroom is quite a wonder in its way: no confusion, no careless dropping of things anywhere and everywhere. Everything is shelved and labelled like an apothecary's shop."

Underwood reached for a small leather bag he had with him.

"I shall take these with me," said he, depositing them. "I want you to go right away and sit for

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your picture. Have an exact profile, left face view, cabinet size. Come to me when you get the proofs, don't wait for the finishing process."

Orcutt turned upon him quickly. "What is it?" he demanded. "Have you found a key to our Baconian cryptogram?"

"How could that be?" chuckled the other.

Orcutt's face was curiously grave.

"For a month you've been after a picture; you've had me search those rooms over there till my head ached with looking. I asked Mrs. Lorme, all our friends, er—everybody."

"And you found none," returned the alienist, still chuckling. "You were informed in each case that Mrs. Orcutt had been before you and had obtained the likeness, when there was any. And each time on the plea that she desired to have it for her son. She informed you that it was to destroy them. Why, please, should she desire George Orcutt's pictures on either plea? As long as the original lives it seems folly to entail so much trouble and humiliation to destroy mere presentations. I think Mrs. Orcutt's explanation shows lack of her usual perspicacity. It doesn't explain—even to you, fully as the wool is over your eyes."

"You don't like Mrs Orcutt. Why, Underwood?"

"Say, rather, I like you and am indifferent to Mrs. Orcutt," was the jocular reply. "You'd be as wrathy if I liked her too well as too little. No

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pleasing a husband in love I've found." He laughed broadly, gripped his friend's hand and departed on the words: "Say nothing to her about these photographs or the one you sit for. No—don't ask me why."

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XVII

INFECTED with something of the doctor's excitement Orcutt started at once for a photographer's. There was a pleasurable thrill in connection with something definite to do. At first he had been absorbed in the multitudinous interests of the city. He viewed it as one who had not known it before. It was new, strange, delightful, wonderful in all its aspects. Nothing seemed beyond his attention. Museums and art galleries, factories and sweat shops, Fifth Avenue and Third Avenue, the wharves and ocean steamers, bridges and tunnels, and every race of the conglomerate peoples, had interested him in surpassing degree. He had attacked each with the voracious hunger of one who had waited for just such a feast.

There had been, too, a stranger's curious zest in contemplating theatrical and operatic productions. A boyish buoyancy exuded from him as he sat in the Orcutt box at the opera and viewed the gorgeous spectacle of the stage and the gorgeous spectacle of the boxes. Only that his culture was so evident, and that, strangely intermingled with his

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simple bearing, was an impressive air of distinction, Gail would have believed this his first experience of the world of drama and fashion. Even his iconoclastic criticisms were those of one who had not been educated to the conventions of the stage rather than of one who had broken away. There seemed to be a beam of truth in his eyes that spotlighted incongruities, unrealities, overripeness at a glance. Sometimes scornful, but oftener good-naturedly satirical, was his general attitude toward plays, tearing them to pieces with a subtle humor that, for the first time since Gail's girlhood, made theater-going a real joy.

Orcutt liked grand opera, the music and the spectacular magnificence of stage settings and scenery afforded him undisguised delight. But after reading an English translation of *Il Trovatore* he declined to enlighten himself further as to the words of an opera—his terse verdict being that it was grand opera only when he didn't know what they were singing, that the banalities of the words made it comic opera, and the only really comic opera he had yet encountered.

The city and its attractions had not lost interest for him. But it was no longer new; he was not driven onward by curiosity, impelled out of himself. And he had ceased to expect pleasure from intercourse with the social friends he had fallen heir to. The "other George's" intimates had been dropped after a first meeting, a cessation of friend-

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ship as agreeable to them as to him, the new version of George Orcutt being too puzzling for the sporting set of the old version to solve. He and they both knew after one evening that he was not now one of them. Nor did he fit much better in his wife's circle of acquaintances. They found pleasure in things so foreign to his tastes that he could only look on somewhat stupidly, wondering wearily how mature men and women could continue a round of cards and dancing and theater-going that seemed never to end. Any way he turned he was a square peg in a round hole. Outside of Doctor Underwood and the Lormes he made no friendships. He accompanied his wife to social functions with amused toleration for her desire to do things that bored her. He pondered the question whether or not all the social butterflies he saw were bored, each accepting this kind of martyrdom because it had, by some peculiar evolutionary process, become the proper thing; his decision being that the majority for some mysterious reason liked small talk and suffocating rooms and parading themselves like peacocks before the others.

And he could not shake off the haunting sensation that he should be about his work and be done with playing and sight-seeing. Yet there was no work George Orcutt had ever done! His life had been all play!

On his return from the photographer's two hours later, Gail's voice called from the drawing-room:

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"Hello! I'm in here."

Firelight from blazing logs illumined the circle wherein she sat; around her were dusky corners and deep shadows cast by the furniture. She occupied a tall, elaborately carved chair, sitting in it very upright. She was already dressed for dinner and the opera, wearing a gown resplendent with turquoise and golden spangles; diamonds, rainbow-hued from the playing firelight, adorned her bare neck and arms. His eyes passed by the splendors of her apparel, and rested on the elfish beauty of her face.

"Where have you been just now?" she questioned, after he was seated.

"I thought I heard Vance admonished this morning," he returned deftly. "Or—no, it couldn't have been."

"Vance? Admonished?" She was quite blank a moment. "Oh!—and you think I should profit by my own preachment and not ask questions?"

"Oh, no, I like such wifely questions, they savor so of the conjugal that I'm filled with bliss. I've just had a hair-cut—perhaps Joan will tell Darby whether it's satisfactory." He was laughing, in open banter.

"Why do you talk so flippantly of late?" she arraigned. "I wish you would be more as you—used —to——"

"More wifely remonstrance! Positively, you'll be selecting my neckties next."

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"Your wit is descending," laughed she.

"Wit?" He smiled. "I talk nonsense because I feel serious. You don't like me when I'm serious."

"Please be nice," she coaxed, leaning toward him a little and smiling wistfully.

"I'll try," returned he, his eyes dwelling tenderly upon her. "How would you like me to take a job as park gardener? Wait! I'm only attacking a serious proposition obliquely. The call of work is dinning in my ears and I've found nothing that appeals to me quite as much as working in the park. Business, the professions, clerical work, the arts, I don't seem to warm up to any of them. Now, I can't don overalls and keep the park tidy for my wife's enjoyment. Convention forbids that spontaneous and wholesome expression of myself."

"We'll go to Mamaroneck in May," she replied quickly. "You can boat and play tennis, be out of doors all day."

"You don't understand, Gail. I want *work*. I'm aching for it." He doubled up his right arm. "I want to work with that. The sight of men digging sewers makes me green with envy."

"Work with your—arms! You—George—never——"

"I know," brusquely. "The other George never worked with his arms or his brain either. I've worked with both. When, God knows!"

Gail's hands played together nervously. She did

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not know just how to meet this new complication.

The man looked at her quizzically.

"You were a queen a moment ago, sitting regally on your throne; now you're a dazed little girl—why, my wife?"

"You ask why," she retorted, laughing shakily. "Isn't it enough to daze me to hear you talk about digging—sewers? Ugh!"

"Knowing the other George it is rather startling doctrine for you to hear," he admitted with a smile.

"And one I must brood over," she answered. "Let your mind dwell on opera while you're dressing."

"A more manly occupation, eh?"

She flushed, yet said:

"More congruous with your position, certainly. George Orcutt as day laborer would——"

"Truly disgrace the untarnished name," he interpolated, a touch of temper in his voice. "I've no intention of making you ridiculous in an attempt to exercise my muscles. If possible, I'm willing to stay within the limits of respectability as you see it. I have a truly humble desire to please my dear lady. But there are too many closed doors of emotion; some one must soon burst through." His face lighted with humor. "Wife or work is the slogan."

"Alliterative," she mocked gaily.

"More alliterative than true." His voice grew heavy with purpose. "It is wife *and* work."

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"Go now," she commanded lightly.

He rose and stood looking down at her. Then he turned her face back and kissed her on the lips.

"Wife and work," he repeated.

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XVIII

A WEEK passed.

Gail endeavored to be deeply offended, and to show Orcutt that she was. Only—it is hard to transmit resentment where there is none. As her husband he had done nothing unforgivable. And to himself he was her husband. And a most considerate, tender, adoring husband, her heart had to acknowledge. It did more than acknowledge, it thrilled warmly because of this—queer, delicious thrills.

They were together the larger part of every day. She had left off going to a number of social affairs. He was not interested, she had soon learned. She must keep him contented with his life here, was her explanation to herself for studying his wishes. To this end she sat beside him and did embroidery work while he read to her. She took up horseback riding so that she could accompany him and Vance on their mornings' outings. She resumed her music, playing and singing the ballads and ditties that he and Vance liked. She was girlishly eager for instruction, often poring over a book till he laughingly

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reprimanded her for "cramming" and took it from her hands.

It was easy to see why he loved her. And in his ignorance of the real situation her ardent interest in him could have but one meaning—that his love was fully returned. That love would conquer her distrust of him he had no doubt. He humored her whim to remain friends only because he had an idealistic conception of marriage—it was the wife's arms that should first be open. But to-day Doctor Underwood had spoken to him professionally and told him that he must subdue his wife's fears now, before they became an obsession. The doctor had been curiously insistent. He had not given the advice lightly, to be taken or left as Orcutt chose. He, the physician, had issued the command arbitrarily, and had invoked Orcutt's promise before he could be made to dismiss the subject. Orcutt was somewhat puzzled. Morris Underwood had always seemed to dislike Gail. But his interest now was for her—"For your wife's sake"—"In fairness to Mrs. Orcutt," he had stated, and emphatically, urgently, even impassionedly.

It was a clear, sunny day. Gail was in the conservatory. She had a pair of embroidery scissors and a silver fish-fork. For a half-hour she had been busy, snipping off dying leaves, loosening the earth around the plants in boxes and tubs. She was not sure she was doing the work well. Her face was flushed with exertion and anxiety over just which

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leaves should come off, and just how deeply she could safely thrust in the fork. She had never thought about working with flowers—till he came. The conservatory was one of the two places in the house that seemed to content him; the other was the sun-parlor. Michael and he had long conversations about the plants, and Michael, usually silent and jealous of interference, was loquacious and expansively hospitable to Orcutt. He liked Mrs. Orcutt, but not when poking a finger about his plants. He was willing to give way before the master's knowledge; but he stood his ground firmly against ignorant interference, even from the mistress. But to-day was Michael's day "off."

The flush deepened on her cheeks. Her fingers cleansed themselves on the white embroidered frock. Her bronze hair, copper colored under the sun, gathered some of the loam as she pushed the soft locks away from her forehead. The gray eyes, purple with excitement, peered out from their encircling black fringe in careful scrutiny of each stroke she made. Her red mouth was slightly open, her breath coming in soft catches.

Orcutt stood in the doorway. An indulgently amused smile was on his lips—she was trying so hard and doing so poorly. He stepped forward on the cement floor. Gail turned, scissors and fork thrust behind her with the guilty confusion of a child caught in a misdemeanor.

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"Oh!" Her laugh rang out, "I thought it was Michael."

Orcutt took the fork from her hands.

"Look," he enjoined, thrusting it into the earth. "This is the way to dig. Why didn't you ask me to show you?" He smiled. "Together we might safely resist Michael's wrath, I think."

Her eyes, smiling, yet somewhat wistful, upraised to his.

"I was ashamed to. I have to ask you so many things. I don't seem to know anything about—real things."

He caught her hands in his, his brooding expression giving way to boyish excitement.

"Dear, let's cut for the open and have a taste of real things. As soon as Spring opens up let's get a covered wagon and two stout horses and a couple of men to drive and cook, and let you and I and the boy go gypsying. It came to me as I drove home that this is the thing of all things that I should like to do. We'll go as the grass begins to look through. Think! to lean against a tree bursting with blooms and view the pageant of Spring!—to lie on a bank and listen to a brook gurgle its way to the river! And to hear the birds in the early morning! And to smell the earth! It puts new life into me to think of it!"

Her mouth opened again over soft catches of breath. The only pageant of Spring she had ever seen had been from a whizzing automobile. The

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smell of the earth!—she had caught a whiff of its intoxicating fragrance from the soil she had been turning over.

Her eyes raised again, filled with hurting wonder.

"I've never seen the Spring—really. And I didn't know till now that I hadn't." She laughed softly. "I'm like a flower in a pot, my roots have twisted round and round in one little close circle and I've never known how cramped they are till they began to reach out into fresh earth."

He brought her hands up to his shoulders and his arms encircled her.

"Poor little house flower," he whispered. "Not to have seen the woods in the early morning!—And at dusk!—And after a storm—when it is profanation to do more than peep in with bated breath."

"I have always been afraid of the woods. Think of it!"

There was shame in her eyes. And for more than this statement. She was beginning to realize the infinite resources of life and was in a daze over them.

"Oh! I do so want to learn about—about the deeper things of life that I don't understand now—— Do you think I ever can?"

The man's eyes dwelt tenderly upon her. He had never quite lost a thrill of wonder that this exquisite being was his wife. And it came to him now that she was in his arms, unafraid! And wistful, seeking knowledge, dreamily lovely with the

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dawn of a broader vision that carried her without herself.

"You can be anything you want to be. Those wings of yours that are beating against the chrysalis are so wonderful that you can't imagine all their glory. Convention—this deadly routine—indoors! We'll leave it all. We'll go away. We'll be our own happiness. Instead of a diamond tiara we'll wind a red 'kerchief about this pretty head in true gypsy style, and get you——"

"Glass beads," she dimpled. "I must have glass beads! And big ear-rings that dangle, and a short skirt—a red brocade one! Oh! I know how a gypsy should dress!"

"Sure!" chaffed he. "You've seen them in opera."

"And you," she went on excitedly, "must wear a red 'kerchief about your head with a black slouch hat over it, and have a cloth of gold waistcoat and velvet trousers! And you must look villainous—like a terrible, terrible bandit!"

"And all the while I'll be a skulking poacher. We'll filch chickens from nice respectable barnyards and roast them on a spit before a brushwood fire. And the smoky taste will seem ambrosia——"

"We'll have the fire by the river," cried she, "so that we can see the reflection in the water—a red-gold flame——"

"And we'll catch silver-spangled fish——"

Her eyes quickened. "And we'll have a dog, a

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floppy-eared dog that runs under the wagon day-times and bays at night at the stars while——"

"We sit on the ground before an ember fire," quoth he, "an ember fire that isn't a fire at all, but is music and poetry and magic. We'll gaze into it and——"

"Talk," she whispered, "about the things I don't know. It'll be dark so that I can't see if you are laughing at my foolish questions. And I'll——"

"Be too full of the wonder of the night to know whether I'm answering wisely or foolishly. I'll tell you marvellous tales, and hold you to my heart—like this. . . . And——"

His mouth came to hers.

They kissed each other, rather solemnly, then in a clinging, tumultuous, hungry way.

"My wife!"

Wife!—At the word a tremor passed through her. She sent a dazed look into his face, then her eyes fell upon her hands that clasped his neck.

"Oh!" It was a cry of dismay. "Let me go! Let me go!"

"Why?" he asked, a tender laugh in his tone.

"Please," she begged, her hands tugging frantically at his arms.

"Come," he soothed, with a faint humor in his eyes. "You've kissed your husband—but that's a wife's prerogative, isn't it, dear? Don't struggle, beloved. You can never go now. You know that."

She gazed up at him, affrightedly.

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His hands were immovably locked behind her—the hands of a husband! And there was nothing that she, a wife, could say to unlock them! The surrendering of her lips had nullified every argument that she could now bring forth.

The man smiled, indulgently.

"Just a little gypsy girl!" he crooned. "A little gypsy girl who is going to love her husband and be happy! Yes?"—— His mouth brushing hers.

Her lips opened over a shriek—a loud piercing cry that reached to the hall and the rooms beyond, and that brought hurrying footsteps down the hallway. With a hysterical sob she sprang from his loosened arms, crushed a prickly cactus leaf within her hand, and held the hand up, scratched and bleeding, before Jackson's inquiring eyes.

"You must have thought—I was—dying—by that shriek," she gasped. "I was so interested—in—what Mr. Orcutt—was saying that I grabbed hold of the cactus—without—thinking——"

Jackson looked at her hand, then ran nimbly for the aseptic box and bandages. Orcutt turned the cold water on at the faucet.

"Put your hand under this," said he quietly.

"Mama!"

Vance ran into the room, palpitating with excitement. He looked up at his father.

"Is it a big hurt or a teeny one?" he questioned anxiously.

The footman, the parlor-maid, an up-stairs girl,

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appeared at the door. Other steps came down the hall.

"Mama has hurt her hand," explained Vance, in rising staccato.

"And I screamed very foolishly," added Mrs. Orcutt, with a nod of dismissal.

Jackson appeared with the bandages. Jackson's fingers were very deft at this.

"I bandaged your hand once, Mistah George, when your mother thought it was cut in two. My! but she was a scared woman that day! She 'most fainted before the doctor got here."

Vance watched the performance and questioned eagerly about each move. Gail kept her eyelids lowered. Orcutt, standing quietly to one side, scrutinized her white, shaken face. It was hysterics, was the result of his cogitations.

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XIX

THE mother caught the child close in her arms. They were in her room.

"O, my baby! my baby!"

Vance wriggled. He did not like to be called a baby. And he could not understand his mother's wild outburst of tears. Hadn't she just told Jackson that her hand felt all right now that it was bandaged?

"Does it hurt so very bad, Mama?"

The mother kissed him, distractedly.

"Let me hold you so, against my heart! Mama needs you. I meant to save my boy—— And—and my boy must—save—me——"

"Save you! How, Mama? What are you afraid of?"

"Myself," uttered Gail wildly. "Day after day—seeing him—— And my life was so bare—— And to be loved tenderly—like this——"

"Him! Do you mean Papa? Why, Papa wouldn't hurt you now, Mama! Papa's good now—isn't he?" Vance's eyes were suddenly troubled. A long while ago his Mama's shoulder had been

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bruised where Papa had thrown something against it, a funny reeling Papa, who had wanted to take Vance riding and his Mama wouldn't let him. "My —my Papa didn't hurt your hand—did he?"

"No!" she answered, fiercely. "I hurt my own hand—wilfully—as I have done all the—other things."

"But why don't you let Papa help you? Papa's strong enough for anything."

"Strong!" She caught her breath. "It's his strength that—draws me—— I am so—tired—— And a protecting love—— No! No! No!"

The boy squared his shoulders.

"Tell me, Mama. I'll help you, the best I can."

"You have helped me," she whispered. "You can go now and telephone Aunt Kate Lorme. Tell her that I want her to come here right away, to leave anything she's doing and come."

Vance went, delightedly. It was only recently that he had learned to use the telephone by himself.

Gail beat her hands together.

"Oh! Oh!" she uttered frenziedly.

Her plight had been awful enough before. Waking or sleeping she was never fully at ease; her nerves were always keyed to a strained expectancy. The clang of the door-bell; the telephone; the approach of a messenger boy; a policeman at her gates; all these brought a suffocating apprehension.

She had wondered if a woman could be in a more

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perilous position—— Any moment some one might cross her path who knew this man—— His memory might return, bringing with it attendant obligations that would necessitate his declaring himself—George Orcutt, always under the influence of liquor, was not a safe person to hold a secret—and the other dread thing—when he should refuse to remain quiescent as a friend——

She had been quakily apprehensive of each and all of these, and prepared for them in a measure. Nothing could have surprised her but this act of her own, this mad, blind, weak act of a *girl,* she called it in her fury. She had been forgetful of her responsibilities, of her womanhood, of her—motherhood!

Yet—it had been so *natural* a thing to do. To be in his arms, to raise her lips to his—had been just another step in the life they had lived together for the past four months. She saw now the stages that had led to it: their daily contact; their interchange of thoughts and courtesies; their dependence upon each other for companionship; their mutual relationship toward Vance—they had laughed together with the child, their child! and had worried over his ailments, and exchanged humorous glances of understanding above his head.

The bars that separated her from him had come down so gradually that she had not noticed their absence. "Gypsying?" When he had spoken the word a magic had come with it. She wanted to be

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free! And freedom was in the word. Her blood had thrilled. An intoxication had shaken her. There had been no bonds. There had been only the Open—the great Open!—a blue sky, the fragrance of flowers—and he and she!

She rose and walked the floor, twisted her hands, unmindful of the bandage and the lacerated flesh.

What was she to do now?

"Mama, I telephoned Aunt Kate," piped Vance. "She says she'll be here in ten minutes. She was just going out and the car was at the door. And Papa's going riding, and I'm going with him." He held up his face to be kissed. "Papa's nicer now than Charlie Snow's papa, or Clyde Emmon's, or *any* boy's—isn't he?" He broke away from her. "Papa's whistling for me!"

Gail stood at the window and watched the two ride down the drive. The man's erect, muscular figure was well suited to riding clothes. Vance, on his pony, emulated his father's manner, as nearly as possible. Gail watched them—and planned, planned desperately, all the while feeling herself in an eddy that was whirling her to the bottom and destruction.

"He is a father that will not shame him," she uttered feverishly. "Vance idolizes him. And *it is a chance."*

"What is a chance?"

It was Mrs. Lorme.

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Gail turned, held out her hands with impassioned gesture.

"After Vance's operation I want you to ask George and Vance to go with you to Florida. Miss Lauder will take care of Vance. *He* wants to work out-of-doors—there is your orange grove—get him interested in that—— Get him to *buy* one! He can keep Vance—half the—time."

"Gail! What is this! Keep Vance!"

"Please! Please!" sobbed the piteous voice. "No matter about my reasons. Take *him* away!" Her feverish hands clasped Mrs. Lorme's neck.

"Gail, what is the matter! Why yesterday when you and George were at our house you and he were as chummy——"

"Yesterday?" Gail shivered. "It seems a lifetime since yesterday. . . . I was on the height then—— You remember that time on Mount Pisgah when we were up above the clouds, only the sky above us, the clear blue sky, that seemed to draw us up—up—up! and the rarefied air that made us giddily happy like foolish children! and the disregard we had for the heavy rain-filled clouds beneath. . . . There was no beneath to our seeming—no rocks, no dangerous passes; no declivities waiting for a false step to destroy us! . . . . We stood on the summit and laughed and inhaled the intoxicating air and were irresistibly, wildly, ecstatically happy. We were children of Pan." A long tremor shook her, she spoke scarcely above her breath. "For

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four months I was on a summit, a child of Pan.... I'm down now with the clouds blinding me and hidden fissures waiting to catch my feet and throw me—— The blue sky and transparent air are gone——"

Mrs. Lorme patted the bowed head.

"Poor little chick! Why do you beat your wings this way? You are going to make up wholly with George some day—why not now? This holding off a month more or less—what does it matter? And dear, it's not fair to George. If he should go to the bad again, I'd blame you, not him. A husband is a husband. You can't talk about favors when a man's position entails rights. You could make terms before because George knew that the law was on your side. It's different now. George offers you his undivided affection. And he's different. Now that his flesh has lost the bloat and puffiness he's a mighty handsome man. I never talked to him two hours before all told, so I can't say from first hand what he used to be like, but he's mighty fascinating now. I have an old woman's foolish fondness for him. If I were in your shoes I'd be crying for his kisses, not crying out against 'em."

"Kate, there is something between him and me as wide as the ocean. He can never be more to me than he is now. I want you to understand this—just the fact, for I cannot explain—and understanding this, you will help me."

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Mrs. Lorme sat back and dropped her hands to her lap with a dumbfounded thump.

"Are you out of your head? You must be to talk like this! Why of course you and George are going to live together like rational beings. What sort of conduct is this for a wife? It's not that you're afraid he'll be going to sporting again? Return to the other personality?" scornfully.

"N-o."

"That's good to hear anyhow. I don't believe one mite in the double personality business. George has just swung around to his better self as many another man has. He had too noble a father and mother not to be good himself at bottom. In the sanatorium he was sober and out of temptation long enough to get a new grip on himself. Losing his memory was a blessing; he didn't have old associations filling his mind and contending against his better ideas. The bad in him has simply given way to the good. It's no mystery to me about his knowledge of literature and scientific things. You remember the occasions he used to disappear for weeks at a time?"

Yes; Gail remembered the occasions when George Orcutt was in a private hospital with doctors and nurses laboring to bring him safely through delirium tremens.

"He was studying," asserted Mrs. Lorme. "He was off alone somewhere reading and instructing himself. His father used always to shut himself up

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to read. George's mind has held on to the things he learned on those occasions—to the good he wrought for himself in secret. That's my opinion and always will be. Nowadays, everything outside of the simple A B C of life is called a psychological phenomenon. But no matter how it's happened, George *has* reformed. I was as down on him as any one when he was a wastrel. But he's no wastrel now. He's a husband to love and be proud of. And you ask me to carry him away from you! to keep him away!"

"And you will! you will! Promise me!"

"Gail, sweet, I don't like to go against you, but——"

"You are against me," uttered Gail, in a wail of despair. "And Vance, my own baby, is against me! And—and *he* is—— Oh! I realize that you wouldn't be if you knew—— And—and *he* wouldn't be—if he knew. That's the thing that's killing me. I can't tell—I must keep it all locked here in my breast. . . . You all love me—yet I'm alone—alone! And I can only fight and fight and *fight—alone!*"

Her face was ghastly, ravaged as though with sickness. Mrs. Lorme, who had loved her all the years, looked at her now in troubled questioning. This utter desperation—what could it mean?

"Dear, I want to see you happy. And that's the reason that I want you and George——"

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"No—no—no!" came frantically. "And he must not kiss me again, Kate. *He must not!*"

"Why—why—you act as though you're afraid of yourself!"

Mrs. Lorme contemplated with staring eyes Gail's crimsoning face.

"You are! Well, of all——"

"Crazy old Kates, you're the craziest," came in a shaky voice. The slender fingers dug into the woman's arm. "Promise me to do what I ask," she implored. "Promise! *Promise!*"

"Child, it's all wrong. I feel it—I know it! But —I promise."

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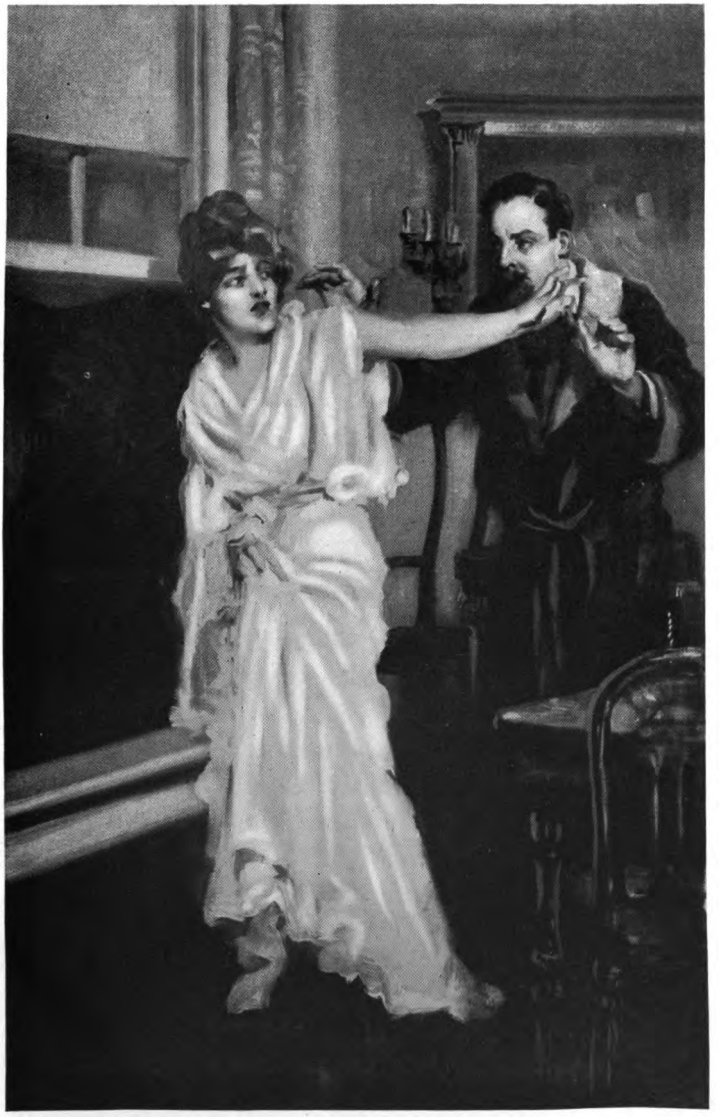

"'Please go!—please—please!' she whispered"—*Page 149*

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XX

CLUTCHING wildly at her open kimona of white and gold, Gail closed it over the flimsy, beribboned night-dress beneath, shrank into a friendly shadow, cast a hapless look about the room.

"You!—Here!" she panted.

"Why not?" answered Orcutt.

He stood a few feet from her, arrayed in a long velvet dressing-gown.

"Go!" she commanded. "Go, or——"

"What?" asked he.

She gazed at him in a sort of frozen terror.

"Come, Gail, there is nothing to be frightened about. To see your face one might think I was a lawless intruder criminally invading a strange maid's sanctuary. Sit down, please. I want to talk to you." He smiled. "Don't blush so, dear."

"Please go!—please—*please!*" she whispered.

"Go where? Away from you forever? Is that what you are asking? I told you that first day at the sanatorium that I should either be your husband or not be. Don't you see, beloved, that you and I must live our lives wholly together—or wholly

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apart? There can be no middle course for me, loving you as I do. And not after to-day. You *have* kissed me; nothing you may say can ever undo that."

Gail gripped the silken drapery of the window and drew it before her.

"I don't want you here," she cried, "and you know I don't. It is cruel for you—to—to——"

"What, dear? To want to have my wife for my own? My God! sweetheart, if you knew how my arms have ached to hold you! Not a day but I feel I must draw you close against my heart. You are my world. And I want to take you away somewhere with me. I want you to leave this burdensome house with its wretched memories, and go with me to find a new happiness. What is a man's strength for if it cannot protect the woman God gave him!"

"Protect! Do you call it protecting to—to—try to—force——"

"Yes," he said gravely. "You have dwelt on the injuries that I did you—the I that my present consciousness knows nothing about—till you have lost the power to judge rightly. There can be no true harmony in our home, no right atmosphere for Vance, till you and I are leading normal lives together."

He reached his arms toward her.

"My own darling! Where do you belong, where is your safety, your happiness, if not here? Forget

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everything but that I love you with my whole heart. . . . And that I need you! Dear, tender little wife, don't you see how badly I need your love? What a strange world this is that I am now groping in! . . . . And when my own wife treats me like a stranger! Dear God! What have I to turn to! I am a man adrift, with no anchorage but you. And you! you are love, life, everything to me. Oh, my dear wife, don't you see that your place is here, in my arms?"

Her eyes dropped—so that he should not see their pity. An enveloping tenderness assailed her. His eyes were so frank and boyish. And he had been so generous, so considerate of her, had accepted so uncomplainingly her mandate of friendship. Her tongue stuck to her throat.

"Dear!" he whispered.

"I—you——" she essayed weakly.

Then—her own desperate case clutched her. Somehow she must get him out of her room. He was a husband, with rights.

"You must go, go now!" she commanded passionately. "You shall not stay here. I will call the servants, the police, any one!"

"You will not," he returned sternly. "This is my house and you are my wife; no one shall interfere with my conduct with either. And I ask you now, in simple justice, never to repeat your performance of this morning. I ran into Gregory and Bryan just as they were agreeing that 'the old Or-

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cutt had broken out again, as they had predicted.' They believed that *I* had injured your hand!"

His arms fell to his side, and a clammy fear looked out from his eyes.

"Good God! Did I ever—abuse you, Gail?"

This was her opportunity to prove his unworthiness. Her head raised in scorn. But she did not speak.

He had never injured her—and he loved her—she was his wife—he was in her room—yet there was a chivalrous gentleness in his seeking.

"No," she whispered. "You never did."

He laughed, a rapturous utterance. And quickly his hands came out and caught her, his arms wrapping her closely to him.

"My blessed wife! You do care, don't you?"

"No—no—no!" She evaded his lips, her face burying itself against the velvet shoulder.

He laughed again, and kissed her hair, her neck, the soft bare arms.

"Come," he whispered, "let me look into your eyes," and put a hand on either cheek to raise her face.

A swift move and she had reached the opposite side of the room. She stood behind a table and fumbled with the drawer. Then he saw the gleam of a pistol, and pointing toward her heart. A fraction of a second and he had taken it away from her and was gazing into the magazine. It was empty.

"So it's not loaded. That's good. I shouldn't

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want a loaded gun around where Vance might get hold of it," he said quietly.

"Vance! You didn't think then that I—was—going to shoot—myself?" she asked faintly.

"Yes; I think I did," he returned. "But I'm glad to see that you're still in possession of your senses. And an empty gun serves your purpose just as well." He seated himself. "Sit down, Gail. You can keep the table between us. I'm going to try to see things from your point of view. Now, tell me what the trouble is—the real trouble."

"The—real trouble?" she mumbled, crouching to a chair behind the table.

He waited impassively.

"Come," he urged at length. "There's a damnable mystery somewhere. And I intend to get at the bottom of it, and soon. When I go away, out to the Open that's calling me, you're going with me. Yes; you are. Without you life would be—hell. Just that."

"I can't go. But you can stay here—— I want you, if——"

He shook his head impatiently.

"There would always be 'if,' Gail. You might as well tell me not to breathe as not to make love to you. I can't help it. To kiss you and have you in my arms seems the most natural thing in the world. And to save me, *I* can't see why I shouldn't."

"I've told you——"

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"I know. And your lips on mine this morning told me that all the rest was a lie. Gail, there's something underneath all this. You're sick with fear—but not of my love." He drew up to the table, laid his arms upon it. "Dearest, I want you to tell me what this is. I am the best friend you have in the world. Let us face our trouble together. . . . Come, dear, tell me! I shall find out by myself otherwise. . . . Come, trust me! No matter *what it is,* I should share your burdens."

Her eyes searched his piteously.

"Your friend and lover," he answered. "Dear, tell me! Don't you see that in the end this is what it must come to, that there is no other way?"

Her eyes turned from his, and a burning blush spread from her throat up over her face. He would know—some day. She saw now that the game was ending—the hand against her was too sure and strong. And perhaps, could she tell him now, his love might make him pitiful. But——

Here alone with him in her bed chamber at two in the morning—arrayed in a flimsy négligée—a few minutes before clasped in his arms—his mind still awake to her passionate kisses of the morning—and to tell him that *he was a stranger, a man whose name she did not know!*

She cowered in her chair, the red blood rioting in her face.

He watched her curiously. His hands reached over the narrow table and took hold of hers.

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"Your friend," he whispered.

She met his eyes despairingly.

"I can never tell you."

"Then there *is* something!"

"Yes," she returned, the word drawn from her.

"What?"

The crimson of her cheeks gave place to a pinched grayness. Her eyes were stupid with anguish. Why had she said this? She was alone with him. He had locked the door and the key was in his pocket. The call-bell was at the far end of the room. His hands were on hers impellingly. She must tell him or——

But he was speaking.

"This something—— Does it mean that I should not be here with you?"

She nodded her head.

There was a tense moment while he looked into her eyes, contemplatively. It was a "mania," as Doctor Underwood had said. For what could she have to hide from him that could cause her such wild terror? Christmas eve she had been palpitant with fear—and this morning she had kissed him impassionedly, her soft body nestling in his arms.

She saw his eyes change. Shivering, she tried to draw her hands from his. He half rose, brushed the light table aside with his foot, and drew her with one quick move to him.

"My wife!" He spoke softly. "There is nothing that could separate you from me, dear. Poor

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little girl! with your fevered fancies! It's this oppressive house. Out there in the Open, where you and I are going, the dear wife will get well."

"Wait!"

Her voice came faintly from his shoulder.

"Yes?" he whispered.

"I—I—am—am—not—— not——"

"Not—what, dear?"

Her tongue would not go on. Her lips shut and drove the words back. Yet—she must speak—she must—she *must!*

"I—I'm—— not——"

Her chattering teeth closed.

He took a few steps, still holding her.

"No wonder your teeth are chattering. This window is open, and an icy blast that would freeze an Esquimau coming in."

He loosed a hand to close the window. There was an iron balcony beyond. The window was little more than a foot from the floor. There was a catch on the outer side as well as the inner. Her mind grasped all this in a blinding flash. Frenziedly she tore herself from him and leapt through the open space. Her convulsive fingers clutched the sash and drew it down and locked it, and all so quickly that the man was staring at her through the closed window before he had grasped her intent.

He looked at her bare arms and neck, and the thin gown that sheathed about her in the wind. It

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was biting weather. "Mania?" Yes; it was that, nothing less.

Gail did not feel the cold. The window barred him from her! *And she had not told her secret!* She watched him leave the room. Then she bowed her head to her hands, nervously sick. A little while, and she heard the door open. But she did not look up. Safety lay here, outside.

"Mama!"

Vance shook the window violently.

"Papa sent me to bring you in. Come on, quick! Quick!"

He watched her breathlessly as the window raised. Then his little warm body launched itself upon her.

"My baby! My baby!"

She was kissing him and crying wildly. But Vance did not mind now. His Papa had come and wakened him and had carried him to his mother's door. And he had told him "to be very good to Mama."

Vance told her this. Also:

"Papa says for you to get into a hot bath right away. There were tears in Papa's eyes. He said they were for you. Are things going—bad again?"

Bad? She caught her breath so sharply that the child was a little frightened. There was something so strange about his Mama to-night.

"Yes, things are going very bad. . . . Oh, my baby! I have done all I can for you. . . . And

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I am so afraid—so dreadfully afraid of the—end."

"The end? Do you mean the end of the world, Mama, that Jackson talks about?" he asked, half in tears.

"No," she comforted. Her voice sank to her throat: "The end of the world for—me."

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XXI

DOCTOR UNDERWOOD looked at his visitor critically. The puzzled frown on Orcutt's face was deeper than ordinary. And his usual buoyancy was lacking. They were in the doctor's study, an enormous high-ceiled room that persisted in looking big and gaunt despite the combined efforts of the occupant and a competent decorator to make it look low-ceilinged and cosy. It faced the east; this particular morning it was flooded with sunshine, a welcome visitor after a week of dull gray days.

"The sun hasn't been out like this since I was at your house," remarked the doctor. "You were going to sit for your picture. Did you bring the proofs?"

"Yes," returned Orcutt, and laid an envelope on the flat-top desk beside him. The doctor reached for it eagerly. He opened the envelope and ran his eyes over the proofs in swift appraisal.

"How is life going now?" he questioned. "Satisfied?—Happy?"

"Underwood," said the other. "If it's a mania that makes my wife afraid of me, it's a mania founded on something that's beyond my ability to overcome. She's sick."

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"You——"

"I was brutal. But God knows my intentions weren't. I want her happiness. I want to get the sick terror out of her eyes. It wrings my heart. I had a talk with Mrs. Lorme before coming here. She sent for me. I shall take Vance to the Lormes' Florida home after his operation. Mrs. Orcutt intends to remain in New York. Underwood, I want you to treat her. I have consented to this arrangement almost wholly so that she may have time to get over her fright and be under your care without my disturbing presence around."

"I never treat a woman," answered the alienist.

"I know. But you will treat Mrs. Orcutt. No other physician could understand the case as you do."

The alienist remained silent for some while, his gaze on the proofs in his hands. When he spoke it was abruptly.

"Orcutt, I'm going to give you a blow. It has to do with Mrs. Orcutt. I wanted her and you to have it out alone. I advised you as I did purposely to try to force her hand. I was in hopes that you had come to tell me that she had told you her trouble. But it's left to me. And the only way to give a blow between the eyes is to hit out squarely."

Deftly extracting one of the proofs and taking a photograph from the table where it lay face down-

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" 'Gail!' he cried hoarsely. 'She is not my——' "—*Page 161*

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ward, Morris Underwood handed the two to the waiting man.

Orcutt looked at them, drew them nearer to his eyes, looked at them again, stared at the two presentments with a dull comprehension that somehow saw yet could not believe. He gazed from them to the alienist, his healthy face pallid and covered with cold moisture.

"These are the pictures of——"

"Yourself and the 'other George Orcutt,'" completed the alienist in significant tones.

Fascinated, Orcutt's eyes returned to the pictures, both left face profiles, both singularly alike, yet in two respects—contour of the backs of the heads and the bridge outlines of the noses—so strikingly unlike that a glance sufficed to reveal that they were the likenesses of two individuals, not two likenesses of one. His nerveless hands relaxed, and, without his knowledge, the objects he had been holding fell to the floor, the cardboard with a slight thud, the paper fluttering noisily against a table-leg. His face grew still more ashen.

"Gail!" he cried hoarsely. "She is not my——"

"Come, let me give you a stimulant," said the physician, fussing over a medical case on the desk.

"Sit down, Underwood." The voice was shaky but peremptory. "How long have you known—this?"

"Since the day you first came here," was the terse reply.

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"You mean that you suspected that I was not George Orcutt?"

"I knew you were not. Let me explain. About four days before the murder Orcutt and the artist dined at Sherry's. I had a table facing them. I was with Doctor Addington. He knew the two men by reputation and regaled me with their histories, particularly Emmet's, whose paintings he praised extravagantly—the doctor goes in for art and likes to think himself a connoisseur. I was mentally fagged and enjoyed the gossip as I do a novel when tired. I sat where I had a perfect left face view of Orcutt. I studied his head carefully, an instinctive habit, and would have known it in forty years and when and where I saw it. I studied Emmet's also—a much better head than Orcutt's. I was interested in reading about the murder and rather amused over the plea of insanity. My opinion of Orcutt excluded a sensibility that would succumb to a shock. Any head trouble he would have would be paresis. But Allen Scott, one of the alienists who examined him, is a wonder in his line and beyond any bribery. I was really disturbed over the matter. On top of this I was asked to receive the patient in my hospital. I was full, but so great was my interest that I gave up my bedroom to you and stacked up here in the study till I had a vacant room."

The narrator stopped to draw a chair forward for his feet, then tilted himself back comfortably.

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"My brother alienists, the State, his wife, said that you were George Orcutt. I received you as George Orcutt, doctored you as George Orcutt, dismissed you as—George Orcutt."

"Why?"

The doctor smiled and directed his gaze a few moments to the window opposite and the view of snow-covered fields beyond.

"Lucas Emmet was dead—justice thwarted or righted could not help him; a little less wrangling than more would not wreck the State. It resolved itself into a question of whether I should accept or challenge a lady's word."

His listener shrank as one who is expecting a blow.

"Underwood," said he, in tense voice, "we will leave Mrs. Orcutt out of the discussion."

"You are willing, then, that the whole matter should drop right here?" questioned his friend, his voice hardening perceptibly. "For that is how it stands. We must either face things as they are or close the case without further discussion. Mrs. Orcutt knows you are not her husband; she is purposely using you as a tool to save the real Orcutt; and she is not playing her game squarely. She forced George Orcutt's name and vile reputation on you. All right, hers was a desperate situation; we'll not criticise her on that score. But when she wantonly arouses in you a passion destructive of

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your peace and happiness she is going beyond the rules of even a game like hers."

"My God—my God!" muttered the hoarse voice. "The horror of these months for her!"

"Her? Think of yourself! Who are you? Who beside yourself is being sacrificed for her benefit?"

The alienist smiled ironically at Orcutt's bewildered look. The bewilderment changed slowly to blank horror.

"There is someone waiting..... I have always somehow known....." He shivered slightly. "Who is—it, Underwood?"

"God knows!" was the grave response. "I know only that you are not George Orcutt. I have endeavored without betraying the secret to find out who you may be. No institution in the city or environs, public or private, has record of such as you on its books. My advertisements, carefully worded so as not to tell anything to those who did not know you, would surely have brought answer from one who did. I have learned nothing except the mere fact that you are not the man you are claimed to be. Nor have I formed an hypothesis. Mrs. Orcutt knows and Mrs. Orcutt must tell."

Orcutt did not answer directly. He sat a long while in stony silence. Then he laughed, a jarring, hideously mirthful outburst.

"I accept the rôle of George Orcutt. I shall go

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away alone and leave her in peace. And you shall leave her in peace, damn you!"

The doctor folded his arms and gazed steadily at his friend. His expression partook of the God-like, the magnanimous toleration of a Father Incarnate. Morris Underwood's childhood had been bleak, devoid of sentiment and almost devoid of tenderness; in budding manhood he had fallen in love with a worldly woman, who had played with him in the thoughtlessly cruel way that some women delight in—using him as a foil to quicken an unresponsive admirer to action. The youth Underwood emerged from the affair a man, his heart encased in a steel covering that made him impervious to woman's most alluring witcheries. Nor was it unsheathed to any one. He espoused reason, gave himself wholly to his profession and viewed humanity in two aspects: patients on whom to lavish his surpassing skill, and crowds apart from himself to study for his enlightenment and amusement. But he had dammed, not dried up the love stream within him. From the first encounter with his patient known as George Orcutt, trickles of affection began to find their way through unsuspected crevices, trickles that grew rapidly to veritable pools of affection—a tender, indulgent, unselfish affection that was willing to give all and ask nothing. He was Jacob and this his Benjamin.

Orcutt's haggard face flushed under his com-

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passionate gaze; flushed, then crinkled to a sort of ghostly humor.

"I'm an ingrate, Underwood. And a fool. I know it. Only—I'm willing to be both ingrate and fool to help her."

"But not a scoundrel," voiced the other quickly.

Pallor settled on Orcutt's forehead and cheeks again.

"You think there is—some one?..... A—a —wife perhaps?..... But no! Gail would never have consented——"

"Bah!" grunted the alienist. "A female will sacrifice any one to save her young. It was for the boy's sake, not the husband's, she consented to play such a hazardous game. You say you feel that there is some one waiting for you. Are you willing to go on in ignorance of whom it is—letting the some one wait?—Wife?—Child?"

There was a stony silence.

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XXII

"THERE is no wife," pronounced Orcutt positively, at length. "When you first told me about Gail and Vance it brought no feeling of my being husband and father. The thought was new, alien, and it took me weeks after I knew them to feel that they were really mine. With love came the natural feeling of possession. But—there is some one. From the beginning I have had a sense of being wanted somewhere else, that some one was waiting for me. I'm inclined to give full credence to my feelings—they are memory's expressions, shadowy but real."

"Right," said the alienist. "I have kept a record of them and have found in every instance that your 'feelings' are accurate barometers. You 'felt' that Orcutt's possessions, his manner of living, his friends and servants and paramours, all his past, had never belonged to you. Not once have you 'felt' an intimacy with things and people in your new life. The greatest joke of all to you at first was the thought of a wife and child. I think we may safely trust the mute expressions of your sub-

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conscious memory to guide us. I believe, therefore, that you have no wife or child, and have believed it from the time I first told you of Mrs. Orcutt and Vance. You are an outdoors man, have lived an active life, and it is not unlikely that it is your work that is calling to you, the 'some one' a possible partner or employer. I have eliminated the idea of a mother—for mother love would have found you if you came from the other end of the earth. I was trying to bluff you into doing for a wife what I now fear you will not willingly do for yourself—a contingency I had not counted on. You see," with quiet scorn, "I forgot that you might belong to the braying class."

Orcutt rose, his hands clasped loosely behind him. He walked to the fire-place, turned his back on the sputtering logs. He measured glances with his friend in a deliberate, uncompromising way.

"I shall protect her. And the boy. They are mine in spirit."

"You are mine in spirit; I shall protect you," muttered the doctor, under his breath. Aloud he questioned, "How long will you be content to go on not knowing who you are?"

Orcutt walked to a window, stood a few minutes, walked to another, still in meditation, turned abruptly, his face distorted with misery.

"I taste the hell of it already. I must know who I am, who is waiting. It is not an employer, not a partner; it is a—woman."

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"Sister, sweetheart, friend, who?" plied the alienist, stopping after each word, watching intently the haggard face.

"I don't know," was the dismal answer. "I only know that there is a woman who needs me. Her name is Victoria. Last Wednesday I heard a woman in the park call 'Victoria' to a child, and I had something of the same sensation as when I uttered the word 'gorilla.' That is, it seemed as though I was about to remember, that something inside my brain was loosening. But there was no terror aroused by the name; only—tenderness." The perspiration ran from his face. "My God! who is that woman?"

"Pray your good angel it is a sweetheart and that she is still waiting for you, ready to heal your wounds," uttered the doctor fervently. "Although," he added, "there may be no wounds to heal. When memory of your past returns your consciousness may revert to the point where memory was lost, and start from there as though there had been no lapse of time between. The experiences of the intervening months may be completely lost; you may wake to find Mrs. Orcutt, Vance, myself, all those you now know, utter strangers."

Orcutt clutched the table for support.

"Not that!" he cried.

"Why not?" growled the doctor. "Better lose all memory of the woman than wreck your life with an unsatisfied passion. Mrs. Orcutt is not for you."

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"Underwood!" Orcutt was at his side, a compelling hand on his arm. "No matter what happens, save to me my consciousness of the life I have lived as George Orcutt. I want it all, even its torment. Don't rob me of her and Vance; don't rob me of yourself; don't—don't! If I should awaken only to the past you can synthesize my present experiences with my past—— Yes, you can. By some artifice of the alienist you can connect the side stream of consciousness with the main stream. It has been done. It can be done by you for me. Promise me, my friend."

"The other woman who is waiting?" said the doctor. "If it is a sweetheart?—if you are bound?—if your life would be worth more to—not yourself—but to society, by losing the side stream, what then?"

"Promise me," reiterated Orcutt.

"I can't. As your physician, I question any external power over you. As your friend, I would wish you to forget Mrs. Orcutt at any cost to myself. I have seen too many wrecks caused by the machinations of soulless women to aid voluntarily in your damnation. Instead of assisting, I should rather——"

"Not so fast," came imperiously. "The whole matter rests with me. It is for me to determine my own course—if I choose damnation, it is not for you to gainsay me. And as for another woman—if there is one I am bound to, God help me! I'll

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do my duty toward her afterward—if I know. But Mrs. Orcutt shall not be sacrificed to her or to you or to any one in this world; do you understand me?"

"Get Mrs. Orcutt to reveal her secret; she shall not keep it," pronounced Underwood in tone of finality.

"Do you mean that you would publicly betray her!"

"If necessary. It is one thing for her to save her husband and shield her son from shame—I can and did admire her fortitude, her brigand bravery. It is another thing for her to injure an innocent man, to wreck the happiness of another human creature. It was not in my mental contract for her to make a sacrifice of you."

Without replying, Orcutt walked to the chair he had vacated, seated himself, chin resting on his chest, a hand automatically plucking the loose flesh between the eyes, his habitual attitude when in deep meditation. The doctor's little blinking eyes bent upon him, grimly humorous. He wanted to laugh, laugh roaringly, albeit his heart felt like lead.

He had failed to take into account the alchemy of love, its blinding, stupefying power. He had expected his friend to shout with delight over the news that he was not George Orcutt; he had thought to deal with a man frantic with eagerness to learn his true identity; he had believed that he would descend upon the woman and hotly demand his secret—his infatuation killed at a blow by knowl-

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edge of her perfidy and wanton playing with his affections. In his mental conception of the scene, it was for him, Morris Underwood, to defend necessarily the woman from the righteous wrath of an outraged man.

Yes; it was grimly funny. He had made the mistake of judging this man by himself—his own love had died and hate had been born the very hour he knew he was deceived by his temptress. There had been no pity; only a relentless scorn that yet lived, shadowing his regard for all women. He had known that men made fools of themselves over the frail charms of womankind, but he had deemed all such inherently weak, fools by birth, the woman merely the incident that revealed a silliness which would have flared out as easily over anything else —cards, drink, speculation, freakish fads or "isms."

But the man before him was strong in character, resolute, forceful, with a powerful will and the saving grace of subtle humor. Was love of the sexes, after all, a greater thing than he had dreamed? Could he, the alienist, be now just learning an eternal truth about man's will and man's mind?

He gazed at his friend as at something new, wondering how far he had penetrated the man's nature.

"Why did you not keep me here and save these complications, knowing I was not George Orcutt?" asked the other, with seeming abruptness.

The alienist started from his reverie, startled by

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the ringing tones on top of his silent musings. Then his face lighted with the fond look a father wears over the cleverness of a precocious child. He chuckled softly.

"A pertinent question. The answer simple, though. I knew Mrs. Orcutt's hand and 'called,' not knowing her ability to bluff. You were a sound man, ready to take your place in the world; to keep you here longer would have been an injustice. As you know, I had tried to hypnotize you, hoping by that method to bring about disintegration and learn your past. I explained this to you at the beginning and you said you wanted to be hypnotized to that end and would help me. But subconsciously you willed not to be; your nature rebelled so strongly against surrendering itself to the will of another that it encompassed my defeat and your own—for I give you credit for trying to help as far as lay in your conscious power. The mysterious underlying self, the masked performer who keeps us alienists always guessing, took a hand—and won." He chuckled again, a little gurgle of amusement over his own discomfiture, and added:

"And Mrs. Orcutt 'raised' me and 'called.' I had expected to force her into a confession. I was magnanimously prepared to make terms with her, giving her time, if his place of residence required it, to get her husband beyond the arm of the law. He was then, and is now, in Paris. Wait; we'll discuss that later. I had not then located him or I

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might have called her bluff—I say might, for I'm not sure I shouldn't have done just as I did. I like gameness. Frightened stiff, she yet never batted an eye. Not knowing where the real Orcutt was and having nothing but my bare word against hers, I decided on playing a waiting game, feeling that she would soon find you too much to handle and would voluntarily confess, making what terms she could. *You,* of course, will think it strange, but I didn't apprehend your losing your heart to her. I overlooked the obvious; I forgot that it was youth and youth, and the danger of such propinquity to a boy's inflammable mind. And you were so close-lipped I didn't know of your passion till it was beyond my power to save you—if it ever was within it. When a man wants to be damned he usually is."

Orcutt's lips set doggedly.

"If you call it being damned to love a woman, all right. An hour ago I believed that Gail Orcutt was my wife. I shall defend her as truly now as I should have defended her then had you or anyone else attempted to harm her."

The men measured glances. The physician smiled pityingly even while his eyes remained cold.

"Mrs. Orcutt must tell what she knows," he asseverated. "The consequences of her confession depend on herself. I shall not go out of my way to harm her—nor to help her. As I told you once before, I do not care about Mrs. Orcutt. I am inter-

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ested now in but one thing—to get her to confess the truth and the whole truth."

Orcutt rose, preparatory to departure, and stood with clenched hands, beads of moisture breaking from his forehead. "Do you understand, Underwood, that I have lost my wife—my *wife!*"

The alienist sat with head bent in deep thought long after the door closed.

"If he only has lost her," he muttered. "If he only *has!*"

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XXIII

FASTENING George Orcutt's big mink-lined overcoat about him, the man who had learned he was not George Orcutt stopped before entering the waiting limousine and gazed at it in a curious, retrospective way. Bryan, the chauffeur, richly furclad, revealing the wealth of the owner as fully as the sumptuous car, ran quickly from the nearby spot where he had been chatting with an attendant.

"Anything wrong with the machine, Mr. Orcutt?"

"No."

"Home, sir?"

"Home?" repeated the other, with peculiar inflection. "Yes, home, Bryan," said he, entering the limousine, shivering strangely as the man tucked the fur robe about him.

Home—wife—child——?

Something came to his throat, so unusual a something that it was a few moments before he recognized it for a sob. He ached with misery. It was unbelievable that Gail was *not* his wife, unbelievable that she had borne the boy, his boy, for another! He felt himself shrivel with the scorching agony of

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that thought. His misery before had been but a zephyr. His wife would be his wife again, inevitably.

A forgotten past and a future that loomed forbiddingly dark with the bitterness of unsatisfied desires—that was now his whole fortune. No wife, no child, no children of his and hers to be called into bloom from the flower garden of awaiting souls. Renunciation, the dreary dole of trying to forget, the going on with part of himself shriven away—purgatory, with the door of his paradise closed fast against him.

It came to him, but came dully, lying tasteless in his mouth, that his body and his soul were free of the sins of George Orcutt. He had never been faithless to her—no!—but neither had she lain in his arms! There was no joy over losing George Orcutt's disgraceful past when alongside was lost the lawful right to George Orcutt's wife and George Orcutt's child.

Yet—she had not loathed him, this unwitting Orcutt who did not know his own name. The thought came as a gleam of gold to his leaden misery. She liked him, she had said. A weak sentiment in answer to his passionate love, but he clung to it as to something wonderfully precious. It had rung true. If all else had been acting, that one moment had been real. She had looked into his eyes with honest liking in her heart for the man she saw before her. Nor had her terror been caused

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by him simply as himself; in truth, she could not see him as himself—his false position made him perforce a fearsome person to her. Even so, she had viewed him with friendly regard, fearlessly enjoying his society, filled with a frank gladness.

She, like himself, was a victim of that arch villain, the "other" George Orcutt—a reality now. And it was for him, the unwitting George Orcutt, to protect her from the consequences of the villainy of her lawful husband. To protect her?—he could do that, and would do it, though the heavens and a thousand Underwoods were against him. She was his to protect, ay, to that extent she was his own—his to protect!

He found her in the library, a book in her hand that he divined she had snatched up as she recognized his step approaching; he had heard her restlessly pacing the floor as he had gone to his room. She was dressed in black, a color she seldom wore; her face was pale, a translucent pallor that, combined with the black of her long lashes and the bronze mass of her hair, gave to her loveliness the charm of mystical poetry. Her eyes wistfully questioned, sending a quick look into his, and as quickly turning away again.

As he beheld her he could think of nothing but a frightened child, prepared to be brave, pathetically wishful that she could escape the encounter, yet meeting it with lip-smiling composure. He knew now the reason for the constant inspection of his

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countenance about which he had so often wondered: she was watching for the first danger signal of the discovery that she was found out. He felt its pitiableness, and his lips trembled with his stress of emotion.

"How is Doctor Underwood?"

"Gail," said he, huskily, "you say there is something between us that you cannot tell me. Listen! There is nothing that you cannot tell me. Not George Orcutt, your husband, but the man before you—your friend. You are in grave trouble. I see it. I know it. This cannot go on. Give me your confidence now; perhaps later I may not have the same power to help you. Whatever it is I shall understand. If you have injured me in some way, in any way; if it were a crime as black as hell—I shall forgive you."

He waited for a little, then leaned forward and reached out his hands, his face intensely eager.

"Soul to soul, Gail," he pleaded. "You may trust me, on my honor."

Her eyes looked into his, then turned to the sputtering flame of the gas logs. She drew nearer to the fire. She felt cold. Her body was numb with emptiness. To cry out her trouble to him—it was a temptation almost beyond her resistance. In this moment she felt that she could empty her tired brain of its utmost content. Only—there was no content there—*for him*. She was barren of his name; of his home; of his past. She should only

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take away from him what he had. Unworthy as it was, the name George Orcutt was now his, and George Orcutt's home and income. He had Vance, who was now as truly his own son as though he had helped create him. And he had a wife. And little as he had her now, that little would seem satisfaction against his desolation without her.

Her lips could not open over the recital. She was sorry for herself; she was sorrier yet for the man beside her. In spirit she gathered him to her breast and cried over him. But her own suffering and her sympathy for him had no power to change the course she had taken. She felt herself in a closed chute hurtling forward to—success or black disaster? She could not know which. She could only go on. The same necessity drove her now as had driven her the day of the murder—to save Vance from knowing that his father was a murderer.

The man spoke again.

"Tell me, Gail!"

She mistook the breaking tenderness of his voice. He was her husband, seeking to beat down the barrier that kept her from his embrace. This offer to forgive her was a plea for forgiveness for himself, for the wrongs that he believed he had committed against her. She was afraid, as always, of the future, but she had not the faintest inkling of the truth that he was trying to convey. She had been planning all the morning. Mrs. Lorme had tele-

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phoned her that he had agreed to go South with Vance and leave her behind. Her spirits had risen. She should have a breathing space. And somehow she would devise new ways and means to protect her secret and herself from him.

But—there were several weeks yet before he left—weeks that must hold no recurrence of last night, or—the blood surged her cheeks—of the morning that preceded it. She raised her eyes calmly to his.

"I was hysterical. The 'something' was just a chimera of my fevered brain."

"You mean that you will not tell me."

"There is nothing to tell."

Their eyes held, questioned.

"I am asking you for your own sake," he urged. "I have nothing to ask for myself now—or ever again, Gail. Please, my beloved, give me your confidence. No one can serve you as I can."

But to her it was still the husband speaking. And he was very near her. She looked down at his outstretched hands—and felt herself trembling. She wanted to put her own within them.

"I do not want you to serve me!" Her voice was high-keyed with fear. She drew away. "I have nothing to tell you. You must believe me."

He leaned back in his chair. She refused to give him her secret. His lips closed. He was through. Whatever she had to tell must come to *him* of her own accord.

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She saw his grieved eyes, and dropped her lashes quickly over her own—to hide their tenderness.

"Oh!"

It was Vance.

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XXIV

HE ran forward and kissed his mother, then sidled over to his father, edging between his knees. Orcutt caught him close in his arms.

"That's a bear hug, Papa."

"Pretty like," was the response.

The child threw his arms around the man's neck.

"And this is a bear hug, a little bear's big—big—big—hug. Oh, I love you a million tons' times."

"Sure, partner? Now, tell me what love is, and what makes you love your daddy."

The boy looked up quizzically, expecting his papa's eyes to be merry, too. Finding them serious, he quickly sobered; whatever his papa did was his cue to do likewise. He took up the matter with a meditative gravity, natural to him, charming despite its unchildishness.

"Love is a nice feeling inside us—a nice warm feeling that—that makes us feel good like—like—getting near a radiator when we're cold. It buzzes inside us, too, just like the steam sometimes——" His voice quickened with the delight of discovery. "Oh, and it shakes us, too, Papa, and bubbles over,

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then"—he was a-quiver with excitement—"we do bear hugs."

"Let off steam so we won't burst," laughed the man. "Good! Now the next question—why do you love your daddy?"

"That!" Vance was scornful. "I just love you, that's all." He glanced up shyly from under the heavily veiled lids. "I asked you the other day why the birds love each other, Papa, and you said 'cause they're mates. Well," throwing out his chest unconsciously, "we're mates, aren't we?" He giggled softly. "What makes you love me, Papa? You tell me—then I'll tell you."

"Mates. That's it, partner," the man whispered, drawing the child again close in his arms.

"Why—why, you're—crying!" cried the boy, awed. "Oh!—you're sorry 'cause I'm going to be sick. You aren't afraid I'll die, are you? I won't. It's only a little operation," he soothed, feeling very big and manly in his own indifference to the heralded illness.

"The operation will be day after to-morrow," interposed Gail. "I saw Dr. Beatson this afternoon while you were away. He thinks it is unnecessary to wait; that Vance is strong enough now. The suspense will be over then——"

"And I will go the sooner to Florida," said Orcutt significantly. "Do you ever pity your poor husband, my—wife?"

"I am giving you Vance," cried she, her voice

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choking over the words. "You will have him while I—— Oh! I mustn't think of it—I must be strong till afterwards! But I can't help but think of it—every hour I see you and Vance on the train and I alone watching you speed away."

"Mama!" Vance slid from the man's knees and ran quickly to her. "Do you mean you aren't going with us?"

With a heroic effort the mother repressed her feeling and bent an almost cheerful face over the anxious upturned one.

"Papa and I can't both go, dear. One of us must stay at home because of something you would not understand even if I could tell you. Miss Lauder will take care of you, and you will have Papa for company, and Aunt Kate and Uncle Dick."

"I want you," he stated quietly. "I want you and Papa."

"You can have only one of us," she returned, as quiet as he. "It had better be Papa, I think."

The child looked from one to the other, deliberating. He had learned long ago to know when to protest was useless. That this was one of the times he realized at once.

"I want you both," he repeated. "Oh!" clapping his hands. "I won't go away. I'll stay right here. Ah!" sighing his relief. Then: "Why didn't you think of that, Mama? That's easy as anything."

"Too easy, dear. The doctor says you must go South; that you must be out of doors all day long

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in the warm sunshine and air till you're fully recovered. Does Mother's boy think I should send him away from me unless I had to?"

The little face was strangely troubled.

"I don't know."

He stared dazedly as his mother rose and fled the room.

"I wish—I could understand—things."

"One thing you must understand, partner: that a man must protect a woman, always, always," came in choked voice. "We must take care of Mama, you and I, without ever questioning what Mama does; see, partner?"

"Because we're gentlemen?" queried the boy, wanting, as usual, to understand things.

"Because we're gentlemen, partner," was the grave answer.

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XXV

THE breakfast the next morning was a silent one, the woman's place seeming more vacant than usual to both child and man, although it was never her custom to have breakfast with them. As they left the breakfast room they encountered Doctor Underwood in the hall. Their greetings over, the child looked wistfully from face to face, his own unchildishly sober. There was pain in his papa's eyes and his mama was crying, and the air was somehow charged more heavily than ever with the mystery that he did not like. He stood at the foot of the broad stairway as the men reached the upper landing, still sober, still wistful, still curiously pathetic. Both looked down, drawn by the child's aching sigh.

"Poor little beggar!" murmured the doctor.

Orcutt ran lightly down the steps, caught the drooping figure with a single move to his breast, whispered something in the little ear.

"Oh, oh, oh," shrieked the boy in a transport of joy. "Oh, Papa! Sure? Sure?"

"Sure, partner."

Setting him on his feet, Orcutt moved swiftly up

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the two imposing flights of stairs to his study. The doctor was already seated.

"Well, what have you learned?" interrogated the alienist crisply.

Orcutt flung himself into a chair.

"Um—nothing," grunted the other. "I expected as much. Now what?"

"Hell, and then more hell! Damn you! If I had not been made aware of other possible duties —previous claims——"

"But now?"

"I must know, of course."

"When?"

"To-day. Vance is to be operated on to-morrow. I must be here with him till he goes South, then both his mother and I must take him. I just gave him that assurance. Gail will not consent to the plan unless this matter is cleared up, and she knows I can no longer lay claims as a husband."

"The woman has you hand and foot," seethed the doctor. "To serve her you'll play the whelp—forsake another woman——"

"Another woman?" repeated Orcutt drearily. "I wonder. But it's Vance I'm thinking of now. He must have his father for a few weeks longer. His heart is weak, as you know. Underwood!—they're my wife and my boy. Later, I'll do my whole duty by—whoever is waiting." He smiled grimly. "I'll do my duty, never fear. I'm cursed with principle —diseased with it. A blighting malady for a lover."

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Blinking eyes behind thick glasses scrutinized the haggard face.

"Introspection—a battle—disgruntled because principle's won," was the jerky diagnosis. "It saves a fight with me, however. I telephoned Mrs. Orcutt before I came and made an engagement for eleven o'clock. The which it is now. Come, we'll go together and interview her."

"A moment, Underwood."

The doctor waited patiently.

"Yes?" he at length encouraged.

"Mercy—for her," cried Orcutt.

"If she deserves it."

"That would be justice. I ask for mercy."

"Um—mercy? I'll wait till I see how culpable she is."

Orcutt strode by him and flung open the door.

"Come, we'll turn on the screws and laugh while her heart-strings snap. A tender, suffering woman! —culpable?—not culpable? My God!"

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XXVI

GAIL received them in the library. It was a large, sumptuously furnished room, three sides lined with books so exquisitely bound that it looked more like a show than a working library. Which it was. George Orcutt's father had been an amateur collector of expensive special editions, books with illustrations painted by the hands of recognized artists, autobiographies containing original letters, verse whose whole text was done by hand in wonderful illuminated lettering. It was a collection to look at and exclaim over, not primarily to read. But it presented a handsome appearance, and, together with the fine pictures, marbles and bronzes, massive carved furniture, priceless rugs and draperies, made the room richly æsthetic. The gas-lighted logs in the fire-place gave added color and warmth. Gail's gown of white broadcloth embroidered in gold with deft touches of crimson made the bizarre beauty a whole.

"Just a word first," she pronounced in trembling voice. "I thought this interview was to be with you alone, doctor. No matter. Please proceed to

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it; only understand that the relations between Mr. Orcutt and myself are purely personal and private. Either as friend or physician, you must not speak for him. He and I——"

"Ah!" The doctor's prominent jaw shot forward. "How was Mr. Orcutt when you last heard from him? Your husband is lucky to have Doctor Manton for a physician—wonderful man! transcendent genius! He spent a day with me while he was here four years ago, a banner day for me. We lesser men can only sit at his feet in wonder."

The man who loved Gail Orcutt watched her face. He leapt forward and pushed a chair under her sinking frame.

"Don't be afraid, dear. In the end he'll be your friend, as I am—*as I am,* remember."

The alienist seated himself by the table.

"You see, Mrs. Orcutt, he loves you. I shall have to fight a combination, I fear."

Gail's lips were ashen, the brilliant eyes stupid with sheer fright; a greenish gray replaced the beautiful pallor. Always before her fears had been threaded with hope, her animation sustained by the vivifying need of action to thwart, to mislead, to convince and to conquer her opponent. Now, found out, and at the mercy of an enemy, she was stricken like a flower scorched by the wind. Limp and terrified and wholly helpless, she crouched rather than sat—waited numbly for the crucifying end.

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Truly pitiable as she looked, the doctor's eyes rested on her coldly; but a sudden warm light rushed forth as they raised to the belligerent face of the man standing protectingly beside her, with lips obstinately set and eyes that were full of fight.

"Mrs. Orcutt, your defender has asked me, nay, pleaded with me and threatened me, to show you mercy. His reason has been that he loves you. But if I seem harsh, cruel—you and he may say—it is because he does love you, because you have enslaved him for your own selfish purpose. In other ways, where you, yourself, have been a victim, I shall try to remember your need and be fair. Will you please tell us your story?"

Gail stared at him with glazed eyes.

He broke the long silence that followed with a short laugh.

"You want first to learn how much I know, in truly diplomatic fashion. Listen, Mrs. Orcutt: George Orcutt was a passenger on the steamer *San Giorgio* to Italy on the seventh of last April, the day after he killed Lucas Emmet. He sailed under the name of George Ormond, and he still goes by that name. He is now in Paris on the Rue de Rivoli, with a valet and a physician as companions, acting under the instruction of Doctor Manton. Your husband has incipient paresis; he is incurable, and will grow steadily worse, but may live for years, a burden to himself and to every one connected with him. I have learned about him as a 'case,' and

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your secret is not outside this room. I knew from the beginning that my patient was not George Orcutt, and I have worked steadily since his recovery to learn his identity. It is only this week that I have all the facts that I have related concerning your husband. If you will glance at these two pictures, you will see that no matter what else is in doubt, there is no question that two separate individuals sat for them. *Who is the man beside you?* That is what I want to learn from you, Mrs. Orcutt."

As the narrative proceeded, a faint excitement trickled through Gail's leaden brain. Mind and body and soul paralyzed by his opening fire, she dully awaited his sentence on herself. Her enemy could tell her nothing about her defeat that she had not anticipated—exposure, the arrest of her husband, scandal, a blighting heritage of duplicity and demoralizing shame laid on her baby—this was to be the end, despite her wild and feverish fencing with fate. She was a specter, apart, distant, sensible of but one emotion—curiosity to learn the history of her victim. This desire had always been with her, haunting, insistent, at times overshadowing her fears of discovery and consequent penalty. Her one real interest now was the unfolding of this mystery, this disturbing, perplexing, weirdly fascinating mystery.

At the doctor's terse, *"Who is the man beside you?"* she started up as though electrically shocked. It was a moment before she comprehended the ques-

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tion in its full significance. Dazedly, she glanced up at the face of the man who loved her. He was her friend because he was still in ignorance. She must tell them—tell them——

Wildly, like a creature hunted by bloodhounds, she fled to the furthermost corner of the room.

Puzzled by so strange a move, the alienist arose, his eyes and brain alert to learn what such conduct meant.

"My God, Underwood, call it off! I don't care a rap who I am," cried Orcutt. He reached out his hands to her. "Gail, look at me. I'm not going to let any one injure you, dear." He started, fell back a step before her shrinking terror. "You are afraid of me—of *me!*" He turned in bewilderment to the alienist. "Underwood!"

"You are the one she has injured. She holds a vision of the other woman waiting."

Gail's eyes, ablaze with a species of madness, sought the doctor's.

"Tell me, in pity! Is there—some one?"

Very gently, Underwood, all physician now that he read illness in her fevered eyes, guided her to a chair and bent her unresisting body to its depth.

"Come, now; come," he soothed. "There is no one going to injure you; no one. Get a small glass of water, Orcutt." Smiling, his voice running on in cheerful, friendly tone, the doctor stirred a white powder in the water. "Drink this. Ah, that's good. Now, rest a little."

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"Underwood," cried the younger man. "Isn't this enough—for to-day, anyhow? You're driving her mad—and me. You hold the whip hand—be merciful."

"The most merciful thing to her just now is to go to the end with this. Do you think she will rest a moment till she has cleared her mind fully and knows exactly where she stands? Ah, you agree with me, Mrs. Orcutt. Come, then," gently; "speak out—the whole story from the beginning. You have a lenient judge in him, and he, not I, will be your judge in the final summing-up. Mine is the whip hand only till the evidence is in."

Slowly her somber eyes raised to the man's she had injured.

"It's acquittal, dear," he said softly. "Come, let's clear the whole matter up. Now that it rests wholly between you and me I am ready to hear anything."

He bent over her, his voice troubled.

"Keep back nothing. I am not sure that even *I* should judge you leniently if you deceive me. Play fair, play fair, Gail."

It was the inner man who spoke, the man deep imbedded to whom truth, Truth Impersonal, was greater than Love. Though he did not yet know this. She sensed it, but only as an unseen danger, dimly felt and apprehended. The alienist looked on curiously. He wondered if she had discovered the unbending Puritanism deeply intrenched beneath

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the pseudo Orcutt's flow of worldly toleration and gay fellowship. He could conceive of counts upon which he, her open enemy, would be a more lenient judge than her lover—and, in part, because he was her lover.

Shivering visibly under the impelling gaze, she answered humbly:

"I will."

She proceeded to her story's unfoldment, the sentences sometimes fast upon one another, and clearly enunciated, again haltingly, the tone so low it was a strain on her hearers to catch all the words. Her voice was colorless and flat, possessed of a dead quality that made her seem not a pulsing human being, but an automatic instrument. Accompanying the dulled tones was a monotonous drop—drop—drop—of a steadily falling rain on the window-sills, and a low buzzing blowing from the gas logs. She related the plain facts without apology or extenuation, argument or glossary. It was primarily a tale of what happened, not of the why and the wherefore. She laid bare her acts, and kept herself veiled and shrouded in a shadowed background.

Her voice ceased. She sat very still, her eyes bent on the floor.

A sound broke upon the poignant stillness, an exclamation of resistless humor from Orcutt. The alienist grinned in quick response. The cupboard was bare and lo! the poor dog had none. The end of her tale found them where they were at the be-

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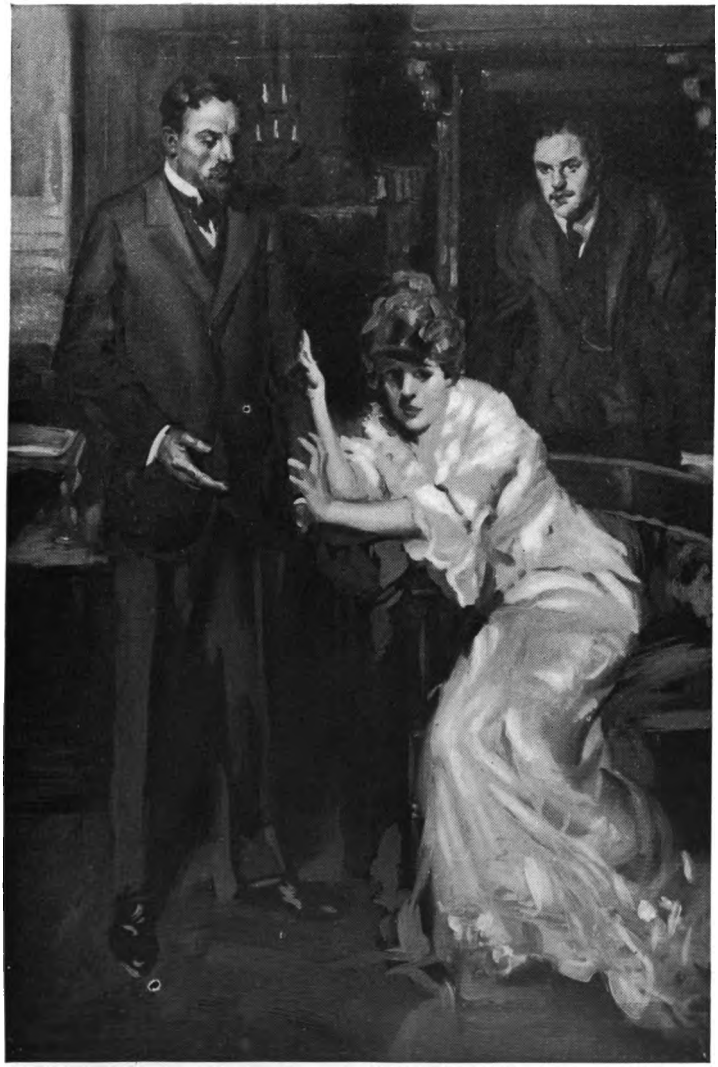

"'You do not forgive——' she mumbled. 'I—I did not—expect—Only——'"—*Page 197*

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ginning—even farther away: for their final resort was now explored and found vacant of the expected treasure. She was as unpossessed of her victim's identity as himself. Its ludicrous element struck the waiting men first, keyed as they were to a fever pitch of expectancy.

He was laughing! Gail's blood began to glow warm with the hope that thrilled it. She felt the awful pall lifting from her, almost as though it were a visible thing removed. Her face turned to him like a happily surprised child's.

"You forgive me?" she quavered.

There was a taut silence. The alienist held his breath—and the questioner felt the pall drop back upon her.

"You do not forgive——" she mumbled. "I—I did not—expect—— Only——"

"Forgive? Forgive?" The lover's eyes swept the pitifully crouching figure, rested on the pallid face, surpassingly lovely even in its veil of anguish. "I do not know yet whether there is anything to forgive—or whether there is an injury so deep that it passes the line of forgiveness to condonement, guilty condonement, because I love you so irrevocably. You say my pockets were empty; that there were no letters or papers about me; none?"

She gave answer in the negative by a slow shake of the head.

"But the label of my tailor, surely that told you the name of my town?"

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"Label? Yes, there would be a tailor's name on the coat. I didn't think—of that. He said there was nothing—not the slightest clue to your identity."

"He?—your husband? Do you mean that you, yourself, did not search?"

"You—were a—strange man—and—— And he promised——"

"A strange man that was to bear the brand of murderer to serve you, that was to be brought into your house, pass for your husband, your child's father—— And you did not trouble to save a clue that might lead him to his own identification when you were through with him!"

"Don't! Don't!" she cried out feebly against his stern eyes. "I was—oh!——"

"You were in great need. I know. But that strange man was—helpless."

Throughout the man spoke quietly, an even, deadly quiet that congealed Gail's blood. She had felt the indomitability of his will when he demanded the prerogatives of a husband, the impelling force that lay always back of his words. She had been afraid of the veiled strength that could be seen even through his lightest and most boyish moods. She had known from their first meeting after his recovery that he would be a dangerous opponent—one that no wiles could swerve from the end his convictions demanded. She was frightened anew. "Helpless?" Yes; he had been helpless. She was a

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kidnapper. Her crime was as great as would be that of a desperado who picked Vance up from the street and hid him securely away. And perhaps as heinous, for some one mayhap was suffering even as she might suffer over losing her baby.

"You must have realized your responsibility toward him—and his," he continued.

"No," she protested. Then: "Yes—yes—I knew—I always knew, only——"

"Only——"

"He came first—my baby! I had to save him."

It was a simple statement. The physician nodded his head in understanding. But to the other, man only, her passion of motherhood carried no illuminating message. He continued to look at her in an appalled belief that he could not understand.

She slid to her knees, caught his hands and laid them to her burning cheeks. Her eyes held his imploringly.

"I saved your things. He—he nailed them in a box—— It's in the attic——"

"In the attic," he repeated, struggling with the portent of her words. "You could have perhaps learned who I am at any moment. And you have allowed me to love you not knowing what other ties I might have. You—*you*, my Gail."

"Please don't be unfair," she sobbed. "My calendar is black enough. You know I haven't wanted you to love me. I did want your friendship, but not to trade on."

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They gazed at each other steadily. They forgot they were not alone. She was on her knees before him, his hands still held against her cheeks.

"I can't make you out," he groaned. "You are an enigma. And *the* woman, good or evil..... The box that holds my belongings—just where is it?"

She staggered to her feet.

"I'll have Jackson get it," cried she. "He put it away and will know just where it is."

She was all eagerness, like a child trying to make amends. But her eyes were unchildishly anguished, holding the sickness of death in them.

Her lover watched her with eyes soft, again bitter; then with a helpless shake of the head he waited.

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XXVII

JACKSON set the box on the floor and laid the hammer and chisel beside it, as directed by his employer, a little disturbed that he had not been allowed to draw the nails and remove the cover. He was not desirous to learn what the box held, it having no particular significance to him, but only to perform his duty. He left the room with the uncomfortable feeling that his work was not completed.

Nor was the box immediately opened. It was as though a receptacle of the dead had been dragged from the earth and stood gruesomely before them. Actually, it was a common soap-box of pine and much black lettering; but not one of them saw it in its actuality. All the horror and desperation of that day when it had been surreptitiously brought into use rushed over Gail. She closed her eyes against it, shuddering. Doctor Underwood's pulse quickened; contained therein might be material for the necessary shock to loosen his friend's jammed stream of consciousness, already on the verge of dissolution. The man whom it most vitally concerned trembled before its possibilities and held back.

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At the long stillness Gail's eyes unclosed.

"Open it!" she screamed.

"Yes; let's get the agony over," said the alienist in ragged tones.

Orcutt knelt and picked up the tools, sweat beads of pure nervousness starting from his forehead. He removed the boards deliberately, loosening each board before removing any portion of the cover. When open, he stared for a few moments at the uppermost contents—a coat of mixed gray and black in almost invisible stripes and a self-colored brocade navy blue necktie. His hands stumbled toward the coat. Then suddenly the groping stopped and his hands leaped forward with the precision of an automaton. Into the depths of the right-hand pocket his fingers went unerringly. It was a crumpled yellow paper they drew forth.

To the dull splash of the rain against the windows and the irksome blowing of the gas logs was added Gail's sharp breathing. She leaned forward, her eyes resting in fascinated horror upon the yellow paper he was reading.

"I didn't know," she panted. "I didn't know."

No one heard her. The other onlooker, now wholly alienist, sat with tense nerves and muscles awaiting the outcome.

The yellow paper was crushed in the man's convulsive hand. His body swayed as though to fall, righted itself, and he continued to stare ahead in a stupor of agony. The rain, the blowing of the gas

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logs, the woman's sharp breathing, all, in the deathly atmosphere of suspense, was an intrusion that seemed to clang and bellow and blatantly echo and re-echo through the room. Both watchers shivered visibly. It was like watching a ghastly game between the forces of life and death. And neither could help him by so much as a thought's weight. He had found his past, the past that was his before they knew him. He was now agonizing over the tragedy that had shocked his brain into a state of dissociation a year before. Would the cut-off sensations of a year ago continue now on their paths as though no time had elapsed between then and now? Or would he have the memories of both past and present, the separate streams of consciousness synthesized? The mystery held them taut. Neither the friend who loved him nor the woman who had wronged him took cognizance of his suffering.

Would he know them?

Deaf and dumb and blind to everything else, they waited the answer to that question: Would he know them? Awaited it hours as measured by their straining nerves, minutes measured by the clock.

He staggered to his feet, opened his hand, and held out the yellow slip to the doctor in silence; then walked to the window, pressing his forehead against the cold pane.

The telegram read:

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"LOMNAY, CALIFORNIA, April 7, 1904.
"MR. KEITH EDGERTON,
Hotel Imperial,
New York City.

"Your father's new horse, Gorilla, backed him and Harold over San Luis Arroya an hour ago. Your father killed outright, Harold died on the way home. Victoria prostrated. Please wire full instructions about your desires as to funeral, etc. Whole town ready to serve in any way and overcome with grief. This message will seem heartless, but I have no other recourse. We decided after consultation that you must be told the truth at once. May God help you, my boy, to bear this. Some one of us will meet you with automobile at any hour you may arrive.

"Your friend,
"DANIEL MANNERS."

The doctor read the message carefully, then placed it in Gail's outstretched hands, and walked to the window. He put an arm about the trembling shoulders.

"Keith," said he, the name coming naturally, "I want you to go home with me at once, dear boy. This is a crisis. I speak plainly, you see. I want you to put yourself in my charge absolutely for the next twenty-four hours."

"Underwood, she has waited a year. I must go to her now. God in Heaven—how could you! Ah, my little Victoria, my poor darling!—and I wasn't there to comfort you....."

Gail had crept near. She stood now very still, a

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shaking wraith with the dumb suffering eyes of a doe wounded unto death.

"Who is—Victoria?" she breathed.

He did not look at her.

"My sister, a delicate girl of seventeen," he answered, his voice ominously quiet.

"You owe it to her to put yourself in my care for a day," urged the physician. "You must go to her as a protector, not a possible charge."

"My mind? It's all right, Underwood. But I'll give you the day you want—I owe that much to you, surely. A day more will not seem long to Victoria after waiting a year."

Gail reached out her hands in pleading. "I—I——" came jerkily, "would die to—undo——"

"The moving finger writes—and moves on," was the answer. "No—please don't explain—I can't bear anything more, and that—don't you see how inadequate anything is that *you* may *say!*"

"Yes—I see——" she quavered, and lay, a gold and white bundle at his feet, unconscious.

"Unconsciousness is the very best condition for her at present," pronounced the physician. "She's fit subject for a hospital. I'll carry her to her room."

But the other man had raised her in his arms and was gazing at her death-like face with eyes not easy to fathom.

"Look at her, Underwood. She's like a flower, a pure white lily. Would you believe she could murder a young girl—would you?"

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The alienist glanced at him sharply, his gaze professional.

"No; I'm not delirious. Victoria hadn't the strength to endure the corroding suspense of my absence on top of the—rest. She is dead—murdered by this woman. Strange, that God should make a creature so beautiful and not give her a soul."

He carried her up the broad stairs and into her room. As he laid her down her eyelids fluttered open.

The physician approached with a hypodermic needle and a glass of water. Seating himself calmly, he raised the short, wide-cuffed sleeve above her elbow and proceeded to inject the morphia.

"There, that didn't hurt much," soothed he, smiling professionally. "Your maid has orders to undress you and get you into bed. I will send a nurse, and you must do just as she says. Rest and rest and more rest is what you need now. You've been keyed up for so long that now you want to cuddle down and be lazy like a kitten after a hard frolic to catch a shadow."

Her gaze, pitiably pleading, sped by him to the other. She pushed the doctor's detaining hand away, staggered to her feet, and clutched at Keith Edgerton's folded arms.

"Try to understand——" she implored. "To try to save my baby from shame—wasn't cruel when—I —didn't—know—— I thought you were friend-

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less, truly I did. I don't think I could have done it —if—I had—known."

"You don't think! Don't you *know?*"

"Dear, he's my baby. I'd go to hell and burn everlastingly if it would insure his happiness."

The little caressing word had power to thrill him, even through his grief and horror and bitterness. Hot resentment and anger swiftly followed. His eyes blazed.

"Don't—don't!" she moaned. "I can't live if you despise me—— You know, you have always known, that I love you—— Ah! you do know it —you—must——"

Yes, he knew. Underneath all his doubts and torments and unbelief he had yet known that she loved him almost from the first.

"Knowing makes it all the harder to understand," he cried, a great weariness in his voice.

"I think — you — will—never—understand—— That will be—part—of the—price I must—pay ——" She reeled from the morphia's influence. "Ah—lay me—down——"

No conversation passed between the two friends on their way to the sanatorium. Edgerton sat with chin dropped to his breast, a hand covering his eyes, emotion surging now to deep groans, again to poignant exclamations. Morris Underwood's eyes were blurred with sympathy, his thoughts curiously questioning. The end of it all—what was that to be?

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XXVIII

DOCTOR UNDERWOOD turned the telegram over and over in his hand unconsciously. He sat in glum meditation, critically considering its contents. They were deeply disturbing. And everything had been going so well from the viewpoint of the physician. The lost memory had been fully recovered and completely synthesized with later memories; the mind of his friend was now a whole and working normally—the one truly satisfactory condition by the alienistic standard. Moreover, he had willingly obeyed the physician's instructions and accepted his treatment without protest—precautionary treatment rather than remedial; for Edgerton's reception of the disastrous revelations of the day before had shown him to be now possessed of that poise and strength of mind that should, by all alienistic tests, belong to him naturally. The mental breakdown that occasioned his loss of memory had always been a mysterious thing to the alienist, accountable only on the hypothesis of an unusual combination of havocing causes, a large factor being prolonged nervous strain simultaneous with strong emotional excitement and continuous worry.

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He was now in normal physical and mental condition, and should be able to endure the forthcoming shock with only the normal results. *Should.* But things did not always work out as they should, and the dread fact contained in the telegraphic message —how would Keith bear this on top of his recent sorrow?—and how best to impart it? A simultaneous succession of harmless eruptions could be so easily affected in the earth instead of one terrific and devastating explosion. He had seen a ditch beautifully made in this way. But the brain was not a clod in which a specific amount of explosive could be carefully placed just so far apart and go off per arrangement at the igniting of the fuse. No matter how gently flaming news was dropped on a sensitive mind, the effect was as instantaneous as that of a lighted match to nitro-glycerin—that the resultant shock might or might not prove injurious was purely accidental.

His head shot forward in listening attitude. Yes; it was Edgerton's step at the door. He thrust the telegram in his pocket and rose with smiling nonchalance.

"You sent the message we agreed on?" was Keith Edgerton's greeting.

"Yes; at four yesterday afternoon."

"The answer! You have it—— I saw the boy bring it as I was dressing."

"Keith——"

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"It is true, then. She is—dead! Little Victoria —murdered."

He sat down in the chair he usually chose, a deep leather chair, grown slouchy and comfortable with many years' service.

"When did she die?"

The alienist hesitated.

"When did she die?"

"Does it make any difference when, Keith?" asked the doctor softly.

"No; it makes no difference. She was murdered, whether she died a month or eight months ago. Had I been taken in charge by an officer, as I should have been had I not been ruthlessly carried off, the telegram telling of father's and Harold's deaths would have been found and answered. I should have been free to go home to comfort her or to be tended by her—either way she would have lived."

His friend's little eyes blinked at him inquiringly behind the disguising glasses; his first impression being that the lover was trying to steel his heart against a dreaded weakness by convincing himself of his beloved's unpardonable guilt. But no; he saw that he was simply stating the case as it appeared to him, summing up the evidence as might a judge.

"The message, please," came incisively.

The doctor handed it over, his apprehensions fully allayed by the stern quality of Edgerton's grief. It was worded:

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"LOMNAY, CALIFORNIA, Feb. 18.

"MORRIS UNDERWOOD, M. D.,
"Underwood Sanatorium,
"Valhalla, New York.

"Keith Edgerton left home for New York City April 2, 1904, registered at Hotel Imperial April 8. Disappeared same day after receiving telegram telling of death of father and brother. His baggage left at hotel. Man of his description sailed on Str. St. Paul bound for Liverpool, same afternoon, jumped overboard next morning. No baggage, and no one aboard knew this man and no claims made later. Name on ship's sailing list—Ralph Stone. Believe foul play, as Keith was very high-principled and considerate. Victoria, his sister, died October 20 of heart complications. Last of Edgerton family here. All communications gladly answered that may lead to clearing mystery. Large estate in waiting.

"JOHN L. MANNERS, M. D."

"Foul play! About as foul as has ever been done, Underwood," said Edgerton grimly.

The alienist said nothing. He had not hesitated to speak plainly, even brutally, against Mrs. Orcutt to accomplish his purpose—to make whole his patient, to give his friend the name that was his birthright. This done, he was personally satisfied. And wisdom, the wisdom that is greater than knowledge, bade him now hold his peace. His friend loved her, and the end was not reached. It would be easier for Keith Edgerton to forget what he him-

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self had said against the woman he loved than to forgive the arraignment of another.

Too, the doctor had reverted to the revelation of the telegram; another phase than the death of Victoria—the Ralph Stone incident. He had run upon an account of the St. Paul suicide while investigating the George Orcutt affair. He had thought for a short while that this man might have been Orcutt, as he had sailed on the same day of the murder, without baggage, and no one save the authorities had then made inquiries into Stone's death. This was ten days after Emmet was killed and evidently before Keith's friends began their inquiries. Stone was said to have been clean shaven, a state that Orcutt would naturally resort to as a disguise, had been the doctor's inference, and considered by him as evidence till fuller description of features convinced him that he must search further to find Orcutt.

"Had you worn a Vandyke beard previous to your leaving home—long enough for there to have been a photograph or kodak taken that way?" questioned Underwood abruptly.

Edgerton awoke from his absorbed thoughts.

"No; I didn't take time to shave while—— There had been illness—— I came away without much preparation—— The porter on the Pullman took my shagginess in hand with evident delight, and seemed so proud of his work that I hadn't the heart to have a shave till out of his presence, nor did I

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care—— If I had been shaved—— If I had only been shaved!"

"Humph!" grunted the doctor. "You were searched for then, but without the identifying Vandyke beard that figured so prominently in the newspaper accounts of Orcutt. Naturally, you were conflicted with the suicide, Stone. And even if your picture appeared in the papers, they would represent you as clean shaven, telling nothing to me—nor even to Mrs. Orcutt," he admitted. "To your friends it was as though the earth had opened and swallowed you up—to us you appeared as though dropped from a clear sky;—I see more clearly than I have before how men are lost and never accounted for—descriptions are perilous things to go by—and with so many scents, it is wonderfully easy to follow away from instead of to the quarry. Yet, if it had been one of your own blood hunting for you I am inclined to think the search would not have stopped with the Stone explanation."

"Last of Edgerton family here," Edgerton repeated, in low, awed tones, his mind on the telegraphic communication from his home, not heeding the doctor's musings. "Underwood, two years ago there were six of us. Mother's death, that came first, was unbelievable. That one of us should ever be separated from the others was a thing none of us could grasp. And she had always been so well; the very day before her death she was glorious with health and joy. She had been bothered a little at

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times with a curious pain in her right side that she always laughed over and diagnosed as ice cream or too much fresh fruit or any other conceivably disturbing food. Then——"

"Appendicitis."

"Appendicitis," he echoed, shuddering. "And we could not believe it even when we saw her put in her grave. We were like lost spirits for weeks after—the home was not our home without her. Agnes gathered up the reins of the household the best she could, and somehow we went on. We found we could live and even smile and laugh. But the scar was there; she had rooted so deep in us all that a vital part of ourselves had been torn away with her going—— Then—Agnes!—typhoid——"

He rose and paced the floor, his hands clenched.

"Agnes!—part of myself in more than just flesh and blood. Twins, we had played and dreamt and thought together from babyhood. There was a bond between us more than that of mere brother and sister. We more than sympathized with each other's joys and pains; we *felt* them, literally. For six weeks I didn't leave her for an hour—perhaps I slept some sitting—I don't know—— She died with her head on my shoulder."

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XXIX

THE physician sat in silence and waited patiently for Keith to continue his story. It was something he had felt he could not ask for. Any confidence of a personal matter must be given voluntarily or be forever withheld, had been his decision. Only, he was immeasurably glad that he had told him, glad in a fond, fatherly way that had nothing to do with his professional interest, albeit he was possessed of a certain satisfaction in that he had so correctly diagnosed the experiences that led up to Keith's breakdown. It was upward of a half-hour before the narrative continued, then Edgerton resumed his story, speaking as quietly as before.

"It was like a dream then, and now. The world was a strange spectral thing without Agnes. The doctor ordered a change for me, and Father, grand, unselfish, old Dad, arranged for me to go East. There was some talk of Harold's coming with me —but there was Victoria to think of, our baby Victoria, delicate from birth. Harold was very companionable to her, and it was decided that he must

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stay to keep her company. The nurse remained to look after her health, and a housekeeper came from somewhere to run the house. The irony of it! Harold stayed to comfort Victoria—— If he had come——"

"Stop! There is never any 'if,' Keith. Because many roads open to one view doesn't mean that we have any choice in the one we must tread. We take the road which we, by reason of our being and training and circumstances, must take. The others are only what might have been chosen if our antecedents had been other than they are. Half the misery in the world comes from not seeing this. 'If she had only not taken her child to the party he would not have contracted diphtheria and died'—'If he had only not sent his boy to college he wouldn't have been on the rowing team and been drowned'—*If—if—if*—— And all the while the step we take is inevitable, not ordained as an entity from the beginning of time, but led up to as inexorably as though it had been bodily conceived in the foundations of the universe. Curse and groan all you will over the things that are, but do not, in the name of science and logic, bemoan the non-existence of conditions that in the very nature of things could never have existed at all."

It was a sore point with Morris Underwood—the futile repinings of a world of people. And doubly exasperating coming from a man of Keith Edgerton's intelligence and trained mind. Yet his

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subject had carried him farther than he realized till he had finished.

"The old sorehead got going and couldn't stop," he apologized quickly.

"Father and brother and sister buried, and I not there," groaned the other, his mind wholly barren of the doctor's words. "Victoria lived six months after the horror and shock of Father's and Harold's deaths, and all the grief that had gone before! It was waiting that killed her—corroding suspense over me."

"Come, Keith," said the physician gently, "no more of that. The past is the past. To accept it is all you can do. You are blameless of it all."

"I?—yes." Edgerton's eyes, transfixed with dull agony, raised to the solicitous face. "*She* murdered Victoria as truly as we both sit here."

"And that is what you can't be resigned to?" The words were more a statement than a question.

The dull voice went on, unheeding.

"That she *could* do it!—the whole miserable affair. If it had been one impulsive act quickly repented of and righted as far as lay in her power—But this long lie, this carefully conceived fraud, this damnable treachery! I can't understand her. She's so considerate of others, so fair in her judgments, so adorably tender and wise with Vance."

"That's the solution of it all. She's a mother—and one of the mysteries of the world," answered the physician. "She will not only endure hell for

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the child she has borne, but will ruthlessly drag any one else with her to serve him. You, any one, is but a pawn to be sacrificed. Civilization has given a mother nothing: she still tears and rends for the child of her womb and doesn't know that the whole world of humanity is her Babe, waiting in swaddling clothes for Her to save it. But—what will you! She's a woman. Treachery, lying, deceit! to slay a man's faith!—to deaden his soul!—this is nothing if a woman has a point to gain."

Keith Edgerton's face twisted to a shadowy smile. "A woman has struck you and your eyes are still out of focus. My mother and Agnes and little Victoria—there was nothing but goodness in them. They wouldn't have known how to play a part. We all lived in the open—body, mind, and soul."

He clenched his hands again, and looked past his friend in dumb inquiry. It hung over him—a blank amazement. He had said truly that he could not understand. Candor, frankness, an almost naked baring of their mental life had characterized the Edgertons from whom he sprang. No meant "no" without qualification; "yes" held no equivocations. "To thine own self be true," was a fundamental maxim. There must be integrity of soul, whatever else there was not. The unforgivable sin was falsehood—falsehood by word or act or manner. To learn at first hand of the deception of friend, neighbor, tradesman, any one whosoever,

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always brought from Samuel Edgerton, Keith's father, the terse verdict, "rotten at the core."

It may have been an exemplification of the theory that folk will generally do as done by that caused the Edgertons to be more honestly dealt with than the mankind about them. But more likely it was fear of the scorn that shone from Edgerton's eyes —a righteous scorn that caused the one on whom it fell to writhe in unfamiliar shame. The culprit always knew it was not a case of the pot and the kettle; his own murky color, ordinarily unnoticed by himself, became infamously black under the white light of truth beating unpretentiously upon it.

Both the Edgertons and the Kings, Keith's mother's family, had descended from the Quakers. The gentle austerity, the simple mode of living, the unpretending virtues of the Quakers, were theirs. Samuel Edgerton and Rowena King had graduated from the University of Pennsylvania the same year; the man had taken history and philosophy for his major subjects; the woman, a classical course. Then they had married and gone to California, the one to fruit farming, the other to the duties of housekeeping and motherhood. When asked by a practical friend why they had not specialized in horticulture and domestic science, they had only smiled at each other and evaded the question. Their object had not primarily been to prepare themselves to make a living, but to make living worth while to themselves.

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And because of virgin soil and the sun that always shone and irrigation that never failed and good brain-stuff, they made a living and more. It was not a lonely land to them, this ranch ten miles from their nearest neighbor. When their work was over they had their books and the intellectual enjoyment of each other and the rare ability to think. Then, dearest of all joys, the chance to impart knowledge to their children, those beings that had sprung from out their own loins, and, in that miraculous fact, different from all other beings that the universe had ever known or could know.

The teachers had not been the less exacting and thorough because they were parents, nor the parents less loving and playfully companionable because they superadded the necessary discipline and rigor that the teaching of lessons somehow requires. It had been a wonderful home life, more wonderful than parents or children knew. It bore in upon Keith Edgerton in a flood what an elysium his home had been. A vision of the material house and setting rose before him. He saw the big plaster house with its red tile roof built in picturesque Spanish style, the climbing roses that reached to roof and chimney, the palms, the heliotrope bushes big as trees, the flaming poinsettias, the riotous geraniums. He felt himself again amidst orange groves and orchards of plum and apricot and peach and luscious figs. No wonder he had longed for the open and for work that would tire his muscles; for such

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had been his life. Indoors and idleness were alien to him; as were deceit and lying and chicanery.

"I can't understand!" he cried again, his voice hoarse and thick.

"No; for woman is woman and man is man," said Morris Underwood acridly. He was fond of paraphrasing and almost always apt and bitter. "Give up the riddle. Go to your home and forget her—or hold her memory as an antidote against her breed. I should like a trip to California. Doctor Unwin can take care of things here for a few months. I'll go West with you."

Just then the telephone rang.

"You," said the doctor, handing over the receiver.

"Papa," came the child's voice, high-pitched and tearful, and sounding throughout the room as clearly as at the receiver, "I want you. Mama's sick and I—Oh, Papa, you are coming home—Mama says you won't, ever. She's de-lir-us, isn't she? You are coming home and you are going South with Mama and me—you are, aren't you?—aren't you, Papa?"

Keith Edgerton's answering voice was deliberate.

"Sure, partner, I'm going South with you and Mama. I promised you, remember. I'll go home as soon as you and Bryan can come for me. Tell Bryan the open car. Be sure that he wraps you up well."

"Oh! oh! And may I tell Mama?"

"Yes—tell Mama."

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XXX

THE doctor looked at Edgerton in the grieved, helpless way a father might look on a wayward son bent on destruction.

"A fool there is," said he bitterly. "You're not a dupe now, but a blind, passion befogged idiot. Knowingly you elect to be a pawn. You, a man of—How old are you?"

"Thirty-two last month."

"Thirty-two!—a boy!"

Edgerton's shadowy smile reappeared.

"I was a man by Father's reckoning at eighteen. Both his boys and girls were considered mature enough at that age to govern their own actions and the actions of others; I was given a hundred and fifty acres of fruit land and put in charge of forty men the day I was eighteen, and the responsibility of success or failure was left wholly to me—a responsibility that I had been carefully prepared for by long training. No, I'm not a boy, if a man of thirty-two ever is. Will you tell me what else I could do? Dr. Beatson says and you corroborate him, that Vance should be operated on this week

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and have rest and quiet and happy surroundings for a month at least after. Should you, the physician, advise me to go now and leave Vance?—let him now know that I am not his father?"

"No; not the physician."

"Nor the man."

"But——"

"Underwood, I love the boy. He's mine in a sense you can't realize."

"I think I can." The doctor's tone was heavy with significance. "I—you——" He stopped. Sentiment was not easy for the caustic, jeering scientist to express.

The tender lighting of the younger man's eyes bespoke understanding of the big heart mourning parentally over him.

"I'm the last of the Edgertons, but even so, not without some one of my own," said he in low voice. "No; I have you and the boy."

"Forgive me, Keith, but we count not a jot beside the woman."

Edgerton gazed into the flickering fire.

"Underwood, five of my own flesh and blood, that I loved in truth better than myself—I would have willingly died for any one of them—are gone, desolation upon desolation! Yet—the hurt that *she* has given!—— Death! We are somehow made to bear honorable death. If I had ever thought about it I should have said I could not live without Agnes —— And to lose father and mother—such a

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father!—such a mother, Underwood! And Harold, you would have loved him at the first sight of his happy face. And little gentle Victoria! Oh, God!—they're not all gone—they can't be!"

He flung his arms across the table and bowed his head to its hard surface; the sobs came then, hoarse, unrestricted, racking his body with their outpouring vehemence. The physician looked on with eyes very moist and very wondering. The boy loved them passionately—his dead; for here was a heart stricken sore with grief, a heart that would never wholly heal even though the mind learned to accept his loss with philosophical fortitude. Yet—a woman, a being that the lover himself called soulless, could bring him a grief deeper, more unbearable—and more destructive! The mystery, the everlasting mystery of sex!

The sobs ceased abruptly, the bloodshot eyes focused upon him.

"Why should I blubber like this? God gave life and has taken it again in His inscrutable way. I must bear it—somehow—as man has from the beginning."

"Yes," said his friend, "and alone! I might be willing to lay down my life to save you pain; but what of it? I can't overstep the thing I call Myself and penetrate the forever to be unknown You. Alone! The soul is always alone. Emerson, if I remember rightly, wrote that the only thing grief taught him was to know how shallow it is. You

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would find that even if the woman died, you could somehow live on very much as you are now."

Edgerton shot upright to his feet and wheeled upon him.

"Yes; if she had *died!* Underwood, don't you know it is easier to lose the beloved woman herself than to lose faith in her? Would the death of your beloved have made you a cynic? Death is the kindest thing that comes—sometimes. But to lose faith! To lose faith!"

Morris Underwood looked curiously upon the grief-sodden boyish face, appraising him anew.

"Ah!" The tone proclaimed that he had pounced upon a satisfying answer. "You were brought up to believe that truth and honesty and unselfishness are the natural attributes of humanity. Not to possess these cardinal virtues damns even your Gail for you." He laughed shortly. "I never had faith to lose. I only asked that the woman love me. She could have had a soul as lurid as hell if she had given me her heart aflame. Your divinity loves you and you stop aghast before a lie. Oh, yes; you yet want her. I'm not questioning your emotions. But to reason! To stipulate for the virtues!"

Something of his unfailing humor lighted Edgerton's face.

"Reason can't be said to be in evidence when you discuss woman. In the same breath you tell me both to flee temptation and to embrace it. Oh, I know the latter is merely talk; you've got the

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habit of scoffing at virtue and you spout against it like a park agitator against the Government."

The doctor's face reddened from hanging jowls to the hair line of his projecting forehead. Could he tell the boy that he, Morris Underwood, would embrace temptation—loving and being loved as Keith Edgerton was—but that, parent fashion, he wished the child of his heart to flee from it for the sake of his untarnished soul?

"No matter," said Keith, interpreting in part his confusion. "I shall follow my own path anyhow, so don't worry over what you have said or left unsaid."

The massive head nodded slowly in acquiescence. Yes; the boy would go his own way. He could sputter and growl and look on—and that was all.

"Ah," said Edgerton, his eyes gazing out the window, "I think I see Bryan and Vance. Underwood, I want you to write Dr. Manners and tell him that Keith Edgerton is alive, and explain about my loss of memory. Say you have treated him professionally and that you will disclose his whereabouts when it is safe for Keith's future health and happiness to do so. Say that he is no longer with you but that you are in touch with him, and that you have just now learned the identity of your expatient by chance. Impress it upon Dr. Manners that the case must be left in your hands entirely, that you will communicate with them as necessity occasions. Your reputation will sufficiently awe him into

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acquiescence and make him feel that he can trust me to you unhampered. Ask him to arrange in some way that the estate is not left in disuse. If the ranch is not already let and my affairs looked after, Judge Landlow will give him the authority to act for me—and to keep you informed as to anything that might react to Keith's benefit."

The doctor shook himself joyously as a dog might.

"Good! And when do you expect to start West? I'll arrange for my absence while you're in Florida. I should rather leave Doctor Hall in charge—Unwin is something of a fool occasionally."

"I didn't say I was going West," said Edgerton tersely.

They stared at each other—glared, more properly speaking.

"You mean——"

"Perhaps I don't know just what I do mean," Edgerton smiled faintly.

"You have a vision. What is it?"

"You would sneer at it. To have visions one needs faith in humanity."

"Humph!" grunted the doctor. "You're going to try to give a woman a soul. Don't. This soul business is bad. Love her if you must, for the pagan she is, and let it go at that."

A knock sounded at the door. Vance, enveloped in furs, entered.

"We've come for you. Why—why—you've been —crying, too! Mama's in bed, de-lir-us."

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"You talk to Doctor Underwood while I get my cap and coat on."

The child stood in silence after the man left the room.

"It's a strange world, eh?" queried the doctor in friendly banter.

"Yes," returned the boy. "It is now, but when I'm grown it'll be——"

"Not a bit different from now, Vance."

"But men know, don't they?"

"Not enough to brag about. You see, we have our mysteries, horrid, troublesome things, that baffle us the same as you."

"Was Papa crying over a mystery?"

"Not *a* mystery, Vance; *the* mystery, the world-old mystery, that men try to fathom and never, never do. Male and female created He them!—and laughed. It doesn't say He laughed, but He did, Vance, for it is the supreme joke of the universe. To make two creatures who by no possibility could ever understand each other, and then pair them off through eternity."

"I don't—understand."

"Nor do we—not a beggarly one of us. Keith," turning to the furry object that entered the room, "this young man wants to grow up so that he will understand the simple rule of two—man and woman."

"You called Papa 'Keith,'" giggled the child.

The men's eyes met blankly.

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"That's a new name I have for him. It means idiot and visionary and hero and well-beloved. I shall call him Keith all the while hereafter."

"But he's not an idiot," the boy protested hotly. "And what does that other thing mean?—a—a—visiary?"

"An idiot plus," guffawed the doctor.

"Doctor Beatson operates Thursday at eleven—you'll be there?" said Edgerton, moving towards the door.

"There's not the slightest need of my being there."

"But you will?"

"Yes," said the physician. It was a growl. But his eyes were whimsically tender. He had joined the great army of worshippers and nothing was so heart satisfying as service for his idol.

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XXXI

AS Edgerton passed Gail's room the door opened. "Mrs. Orcutt wishes to see you," announced the nurse briefly, retiring as he entered.

Gail was standing, her hands pressed against the back of an upholstered chair. Her eyes searched his face with frantic eagerness. She waited for him to speak. Her own lips moved futilely several times before they broke the constrained silence.

"Vance says that you are going South with him and—me."

"Yes."

"Why?" she whispered.

"I—promised him before I knew. And, anyhow, I couldn't leave Vance till he's better."

"Then?"

"Then what?"

"Tell me what—you—will—do after he is better."

He smiled, a smile that held no friendliness or mirth.

"Isn't there a biblical phrase about not knowing what an hour or a day may bring forth?"

She twisted her hands together feverishly.

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"You must tell me. I can't stand the suspense. Don't you see I can't."

"Just what is it you want me to do, or not to do?"

"I want you to be kind, not cruel," she breathed.

"Ah!—to turn the other cheek! Gail, my sister is dead. She waited eight months, every day watching for me, expecting me, crying and moaning because I did not come. She was all I had left of my own—— You killed her."

"No—no—no!"

"Gail, I don't feel chivalrous. Do you feel equal to having Vance's operation on Thursday as planned?"

"Yes, I want it over. I must have peace of mind soon or go mad—— Tell me what you intend to do—— Tell me now, *now!* I can't wait. I can't!"

"Victoria waited."

"And died," she cried in tense voice. She clasped his arms, her white face upraised. "Will it help her to hurt me? You can't undo what is done! You can torture me, but—will it help?"

"It may," he returned, with grim significance.

"Dear——"

"Stop!" he commanded. "Endearments do not belong between you and me. Because I love Vance, I shall see him safely through his illness. Little partner! he's square and honest and true."

He smiled in bitter humor as he saw her face lighten.

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"Don't count on my love for the boy, Gail, to help you. I may not agree with you as to what is best for him."

"Kill me outright," she pleaded. "I can't endure your scorn and the awful waiting."

"It is not necessary for me to kill you to end my scorn and your suspense."

"You—mean——"

"That you can tell the truth to-day that should have been told the 8th of last April. George Orcutt is a murderer and should be given into the hands of the law. Your course is clear."

"No," she pronounced deliberately. "I shall never do it. I could not invite the shame for my baby."

"Gail, the shame is the same. He is the father of Vance, free or in prison. And it would be better for Vance to know about his father's guilty life than that you, his mother, should live a lie. That lie has already led you to indirect murder."

"No! No! You must not say I murdered your sister. Murder means the premeditated taking of a life, wilful killing. I believed that you were without relatives or friends. I did not dream that there was any one hurt by your absence. If I had known——"

"You took the line of least resistance. That line another time may lead you into—heaven knows what. Gail, for the boy's sake."

"I can't. I *can't!* Ever."

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"You leave it to me to betray you or to share in your lie!"

Her hands fell from his arm under the shrivelling scorn of his gaze.

"On with the play!" said he grimly. "All right! My hands are tied. Put on your mask and ring up the curtain on another act."

"You—you—will—not——"

He stopped, swung on his heel.

"You know I will not. You have known it from the beginning. A man can't tell on a woman!"

She swayed to and fro, laughing hysterically. Darkness had lifted from the face of her earth. Her son was not to bear the devastating disgrace of his father's crime! She could only laugh and sob in a hysteria of joyful relief.

He continued looking at her in puzzled inquiry. He could not believe that she had anticipated betrayal through him.

"Did you think I should denounce you, give up your secret to the law?" he interrogated.

She stumbled to his side, and laid a timid hand on his arm.

"I don't know what I believed," she cried brokenly. "I have been stark mad with fear.... Do you hate me?"

She was so wan and trembling that his harshness left him.

"It makes no difference what I think."

"You know how I love you," returned she, with

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a sort of childish defiance. "I love you! I love you!"

"And because you love me you are going to drag me at the wheels of your chariot."

"My chariot? Do you think I am asking this for myself? I gave Vance one father, and now, now, if it is at the price of my soul, I shall give him another. I have no pride where he is concerned. He shall know you for his father forever if I can encompass it. Yes! He shall have your example and your presence and clean life before him! He shall! He shall!"

Her eyes blazed defiance. She stood there, a quivering bundle of maternal fibers. The man did not comprehend the furious instinct that drove her. He tried to reason.

"Gail, the open course now will be the best in the end for the boy. This lie can't go on forever. It will only mean more for you to explain to Vance finally. Your child isn't a weakling. He can bear this. Doctor Underwood says he is wholly free from physical or mental disability through his father. Your husband's breakdown came since the child was born, too late for Vance to suffer it through inheritance. And there is a long line of sound ancestors back of him, sound physically and morally. And there would be no murder trial now of George Orcutt. He would simply be transferred to an alienist appointed by the State." His hand

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closed over hers, resting on his arm. "Gail, free me from this position! Let me go now before——"

"What?"

"Before we have anything more to regret," he said gravely. "Send for the district attorney to-day."

"I can't ever!" It was almost a scream. *"I can't!"*

He gazed into her sick eyes. There was purpose there, a fanatical persistence.

"Be calm," he soothed. "You have what you desire—my silence. I promise not to betray you. But I merely submit. I am not in any agreement. I shall wait till you release me voluntarily."

"But I never shall!"

"You do not know what you will do. Now is not a year from now. We will drop this matter here to-day. Vance is disturbed over our gloom and tears; be at dinner, if possible."

"Do—do—you—hate me?"

Her face was childishly upheld. His eyes dwelt upon it.

"It might be better if I did," he answered, and left the room.

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XXXII

IN one of Jackson's absences from the dining-room Vance turned his eyes full on his mother in close scrutiny and asked anxiously:

"Are you well now, Mama; really, truly, surely well?"

"Don't I seem well?" she asked, laughing.

"Yes; but you've been acting so funny lately. You were crying this morning and were de-lir-us—— Now you're laughing and laughing and laughing. You—you aren't de-lir-us now, are you? The nurse says delirus people cry and laugh over just nothing."

"I was crying this morning because I thought Papa was cross with me; and I'm laughing because he's been kind. I'm very happy; really, truly, surely happy."

"Because we're going South together, you and Papa and me?"

"Partly; but for other reasons, too."

"And you'll stay happy?"

"As long as Papa is kind."

The child turned to the man, his little face beset with gravity.

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Edgerton smiled.

"Now, partner, never ask a man a leading question while he's eating duck. There's something about game that makes a man resent even such an innocent little question as to whether or not he's going to beat his wife. Ordinarily he takes such a question as a matter of course, but when he's eating duck——"

The child giggled softly. There was nothing that he enjoyed so much as his papa's gay banter. It was a sort of barometer that indicated serene skies over the household. Himself a barometer of the joys and woes about him, he was soon excitedly happy, he and his mama outdoing each other in gaiety, his childish squeals of mirth mingling with the woman's clear bubbling laughter, honest laughter that sprang from a spirit riotously exuberant. Her child was safe! She was so filled with nervous happiness that she had to give vent to it as does a lark.

Keith Edgerton looked on stupidly, unable to understand.

In the drawing-room she clapped her hands and cried eagerly:

"The theater! Let us all go and see Peter Pan! Yes, we shall go!"

And they went, Edgerton protesting that Vance should be in bed, Vance's eyes dancing like stars, Gail laughing and chattering as though unhappiness had never been hers nor could ever be. She sat in

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the box so that her face came naturally on a line with the man's eyes. He could only gaze at it in wonder. The wanness, the hollows, the straining muscles, the hunted look, were gone. Only the haunting wistfulness that was always there hung over it, baffling him as to its meaning, as it always did. It was like the shadow of an oversoul—a veil always seemingly ready to be lifted, yet always mysteriously drawn. It was as though another being, richer, rarer, penetrated dimly through the Gail that the world knew, and herself knew.

She smiled softly in sympathy with the dainty humor of the play. Her eyes glistening with tears, she turned to him and whispered:

"Vance would think me 'delirus' indeed if I should cry now. But I want to—from sheer happiness. I surely shall if I stay through the play—there are tears in its laughter for me to-night. Let us go after this act; Vance won't know but that it is over."

Vance, sitting between them on the wide seat of the limousine, did the talking on the way home. It was his first play in the evening, and of magnified importance thereby. Suddenly he snuggled against the soft cushioned back and sighed happily. But when he spoke, it was not of the play.

"You love Papa now, don't you, Mama?"

The man and the woman started.

"Yes," came quickly. "I love Papa now—only I

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have always loved him, dear, ever since he came back home after his illness."

The child uttered a surprised "Oh!" Then: "Did you know it, Papa?"

"Partner, did you know that the Peter Pan you saw on the stage to-night was a girl?"

Vance did not know, and the play again became the immediate topic of interest. But the child's prattle fell on unheeding ears. The love note had been sounded and did not still. That they heard clear and loud and sweet. They loved each other—they loved each other! It persisted in their ears like a lilting melody that sings itself.

Vance was operated on the second day following, a simple throat operation that would have caused no uneasiness nor occasioned any previous preparation but for the fact that the child's heart was weak. Without being at all sickly, the little fellow was delicately organized, his freedom from sickness the natural result of care and right environment. He recovered surprisingly, both from the anesthesia and the wound. Nor did he have the usual invalidic irritability of convalescents. He made no demands other than that his papa and mama should be within reach of his languidly eager eyes. He could not have enough of them. But as he grew stronger he began to sense that something was still wrong somewhere. He did not voice his trouble; only gazed at them in wistful questioning, searching vainly for the truth.

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The mother, her heart contracted with maternal fears, sought Edgerton in the library one morning while the child was asleep. This was about a week after his operation.

"Have you noticed that Vance has not been so well for the past two days?" she asked.

"Yes."

"And do you know why?"

"Yes."

"Then——?"

"What?" he returned.

"Must I—tell you?" she faltered.

His eyes crinkled with tender humor.

"I sometimes think I've fallen heir to two children—a little boy and a very little girl."

"The little girl is a very anxious mother just now," said she, with a break in her voice.

"And a woman that I'm mad with love for—don't forget that!"

"I'm asking—it—for Vance."

"I know. Vance will grow used to the situation. It will make it easier for him when we part."

"Part? Part? No—no!"

He folded his arms and leaned against a book-case.

"The very little girl is speaking now. The grown-up woman would know that we must part. These months that I thought you my wife let down the barriers between us till——" He stopped.

"They'll not go up again?—is that it?" Her eyes

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were partly closed as she questioned, a grave contemplation in them. Suddenly they were swimming with tears. She held out her hands, beseechingly.

"No matter what we are to each other, to Vance we're his father and mother. Our coldness is breaking his heart..... And I can't bear it for him to be unhappy now..... I don't care about anything else—— I just want him to get well and strong—— Oh, you don't know!"

"I know that for us to caress each other daily is to play with edged tools, my—wife that can't be," said he gently.

A knock sounded at the door, the discreet rap of a servant.

"Vance wants us," cried she. With swift motion she drew his face to hers. Then she kissed him on the lips, speeding from the room to Vance's bedside.

The invalid was propped against the pillows, a faint color beginning to show in his pale cheeks. The long lashes lifted and the eyes opened wide and gleaming as they fell on the radiantly girlish face that bent over him.

"Something's happened; something good," he piped joyously. "Tell me, Mama, tell me."

"Greedy!" she answered gayly. "Can't Mama and Papa have any secrets at all!"

"Secrets?" His voice fell wearily. "I wish there weren't any secrets ever. I hate secrets; I hate 'em —hate—'em—hate 'em!" He addressed Edgerton as he crossed the threshold. "Please tell me what

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beautiful thing's happened. Tell me, please, dear Papa."

The mother answered:

"Insatiable boy! Must Mama and Papa tell you every time they kiss each other?"

"Oh!" The child sat upright, his eyes like diamonds in brightness. "You and Papa kissed each other! Sure? Sure?"

The mother's laugh rang out blithely, a gladsome lilt that told nothing of restrained tears.

"Listen to that! Our son thinks he is the only one that is ever kissed. What a state of affairs!"

The child's gaze traveled to and fro from the woman's face to the man's.

"Partner," came quietly; "what you really want to know is whether or not your father and mother love each other, isn't it? Listen, little mate, and don't ever forget: I love your mother better than all the world, even my boy; and your mother loves me—next best to you, I think."

"But," protested the boy excitedly; "she must love *you* best. Wives do, you know."

"You see what it means to him," said Gail.

"All right, partner," said Edgerton, seating himself on the bed and taking the boy's hand in his. "We'll put you down a close second. But you must let Mama and me love each other in our own way. You mustn't worry because we don't act just as you think husbands and wives should." There was gentle raillery in the voice, whimsicality in the eyes.

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The child flushed a little in embarrassment over his ignorance of adult ways, then giggled softly his excuses:

"But you *do* act funny, don't you?"

"Not for us, partner. I don't believe there were ever another papa and mama just like us. So you see, you mustn't measure *us* by ordinary standards."

"I won't again," avowed the child, delighted over this confidence between man and man.

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XXXIII

DOCTOR UNDERWOOD stood unobserved in the doorway of the Orcutt sun-parlor, a large, almost circular room with a view of the Hudson and the Palisades. It was the one room Edgerton had always liked, its wealth of sunshine and comparatively simple furnishings giving the nearest approach to the "home" feeling he had so ardently desired. He sat now, his gaze bent on the panorama of the river; the always busy, boat-laden river, with its incessantly changing scenes had a curious fascination for this man of the inland. Vance, dressed fully to-day for the first time since his illness, sat on his knees, watching the shifting boats in dreamy silence. Beside them, in a low rocker, was Gail, engaged in embroidery work.

The doctor's eyes narrowed with displeasure at this domestic scene, and a grunt of disapproval announced his presence.

"Sit still, sit still," said he, advancing and seating himself. "I don't want to break up such a pretty family picture."

Exactly like a frightened child Gail turned her

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face to Edgerton's and shrank nearer to him. Smiling, he reached for the embroidery hoops in her hand, his own hand, warm and protecting, closing over the shaking fingers.

"Look at that for an orchid, will you?" said he, and tossed the hoops to his friend. "The whole orchid family should bring action for slander against the designer of that atrocity."

Morris Underwood let the hoops bound from his knee to the floor.

"Not being a family man, I don't presume to pass judgment on tatting and the like," he retorted testily.

"I knitted an Irish lace collar once," was Edgerton's rejoinder. "Pretty good work, too, so my family all assured me. I was twelve years old and recovering from the measles."

"Who did you make it for, Papa?" was Vance's eager inquiry.

Gail rose, and picked up the embroidery that had fallen at her feet.

"Come, dear."

"I want to stay and visit with the Doctor," the boy answered, not moving.

Edgerton lifted him to the floor, where the child stood very erectly and proudly in his blue velvet suit. He smiled up at the man he believed to be his father.

" 'Nuff said, I guess."

Edgerton pinched his cheek softly.

"It looks that way, partner," returned he, his

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eyes following child and mother till the door closed after them.

"So I'm to look on helpless and see another good birthright sold for a mess of pottage!" growled the alienist, after a constrained silence. "'The woman tempted me and I did eat.' How many more men will cry that before man learns sense?"

"So you have become a convert to circumstantial evidence."

"I believe what I see with my own eyes. She's got you body and soul. Confound her beauty and feline attractions. Yes, feline; a woman has no more soul than that Angora cat there on the window-sill. What a woman wants she takes, and the robbed can starve—or die, for all of her. But Mrs. Orcutt shan't sacrifice you, I warn you now."

Keith Edgerton shifted uneasily.

"What do you intend to do?"

"That depends on you," returned the alienist acridly. "How much longer shall you masquerade as a blackguard and murderer?"

Edgerton leaned forward and looked the other squarely in the eye, his attitude wholly belligerent.

"This is my business, and I won't stand any interference in it."

"So Delilah wins!"

"Call it that if you prefer. I have put my faith in the woman I love—the outcome is between her and me."

Slowly the bitterness faded from the alienist's

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face, and pity filled it—the pity of one who sees for one who is wholly and incurably blind.

"Boy! Boy!" he groaned. "So that is it. You believe that she will grow a soul and a conscience. The woman who kidnapped you with ruthless disregard of all consequences to you and yours is now voluntarily to sacrifice herself for your welfare? Why? Woman's inconsistency always rests on a very tangible reason that brings benefit to herself. And confession would give Mrs. Orcutt nothing. She might do it to gain you for her husband legally and openly; you, the man; not your gratitude and reverence. But—— Do you know what would happen if she gave George Orcutt up to the law?"

Edgerton answered deliberately, the ready answer of one who has turned the subject many times in his mind.

"He would be declared insane, an insanity that antedated the murder, and would be committed to an insane hospital for the balance of his life."

"A matter of thirty or forty years," completed the alienist triumphantly. "And by the law of the land Mrs. Orcutt must remain tied to her imbecile husband till death releases her. Nor could she keep you at her heels without losing her reputation. No; she will never bare her secret till she is forced to it. On one plea or another she will compel your silence and keep you beside her till—— But there is no use going into detail. You and I both know the

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inevitable outcome of this affair if left to you and her."

"Have you decided where you are going on your hunting trip?" asked Edgerton evenly, but the angry cords whipped out on his forehead.

"Paris," was the laconic and startling reply.

The two measured glances, as they had so many times recently. Edgerton had no need to ask what was the physician's errand in Paris.

"You mean to bring George Orcutt here," he cried hoarsely.

"I do," was the calm answer.

"Our ways part here, Underwood," came in tone deadly quiet.

The alienist partly rose.

"I expected as much. A friend——"

"A friend——" interrupted Edgerton in scathing voice, "would have left me to deal with my own affair in my own way and my own good time. A friend doesn't interfere with a man and his woman. He is left to condone or scourge, pity or kill."

The elder man dropped to his chair again. A man and his woman. The old eternal twain—— "Male and female created He them." For countless eons man and his woman had stood shoulder to shoulder against the world or with the world, but together, always together. Even in the brute state the male was left to deal with his mate—whether weakly or strongly was never the question to his fellows. The two were indivisibly together and

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apart from all others—not because of rites and ceremonies or written laws, but by their own free choosing, the primeval law of the wild. Nature was no less nature when clothes replaced fur and houses superseded tree-tops and caves. Eye still spoke to eye, and heart to heart, and the world-old call of sex was still the clarion note. A man and his woman!

And, strangely, the pretty domestic scene that had so stirred his resentment a few minutes before now caused Morris Underwood's heart to soften as he reviewed it in his mind. The trustful gaze of the child as he nestled in the arms of the man he believed to be his father, the woman's dependent attitude and love-laden eyes, the man's protective air. It mattered not that they were not his by the stern code of a brick and mortar world, for the horizon and circumference of Keith Edgerton's world was now a woman's eyes and his law was love. The casuists might wrangle over their ethics, and the moralist denounce, and Fate eventually break them on her wheel—it mattered not to these two bare souls, blind and deaf and dumb to all save the magic splendor of each other. A man and his woman!

He reached out his hand and laid it gently on the other's knee.

"Boy."

The eyes that rose to his were bitterly accusative.

"A man and his woman," uttered the doctor

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softly. "You are right, boy; it is not for me to interfere. Go your own way. If you drag each other into hell you may neither ever know it. Anyhow, it is too big for me."

Hand closed over hand, and the friends' eyes met, at first grave, freighted with the magnitude of the moment. Then both smiled—the rare smile of mutual understanding, like no other smile of human lips.

"Thank you, Underwood," came unevenly. "And thank you doubly because you are trusting me, not understanding."

"Oh, yes; I understand," said the physician, the sardonic note sounding again. "You believe that love will re-create her. Madness, pure madness! But no matter. She is your problem, your destiny, your woman. I leave you to each other. It is all I can do. Only—the end will be the inevitable end—you are doomed for the sacrifice." He smiled, half-bitterly. "You'll stop with me if you return alone—— You may have to come on an errand," he added hastily. Then he chuckled. "Boy, I'm going to let you go your own way; but it's blamed hard, you see. Even as I let go the line with one hand I want to pull it back with the other. No, my word's given; you needn't fear."

"It isn't that," Edgerton explained his frown. "I'm disturbed that I can't tell you definitely what my plans are. I've promised Vance to go South with him, I've assured Gail that I shall never betray her

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secret. Those things I shall do, but what else—God knows!"

"It all depends on the woman."

"Yes."

"Then if God knows He'd be ashamed to tell just what you will do," pronounced his friend harshly, and left on the words, walking so rapidly that he was gone before Edgerton could answer.

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XXXIV

LIKE a big brown hen with a dozen little chicks squatting near, was Everglade Villa, the Lormes' southern home. It comprised a big bungalow and a group of smaller buildings devoted to servants' quarters and commissariat, much in the manner of an old plantation. Gail, on the floor of the piazza, knees held loosely between clasped hands, upraised a laughing face to Mrs. Lorme's.

"Why don't you relieve your inner consciousness, Kate dear? Why not ask me outright the questions that are furrowing your brow?" she teased.

Mrs. Lorme's shrewd eyes fastened on the radiant face, the almost too radiant face, she could not help but feel. The unrestrained happiness that Gail had evinced during the past two weeks aroused her suspicions. The whole thing was puzzling. She had left her in New York five weeks before in open revolt against her husband, alleging that it was impossible that he and she could make the trip South together—and tragically unhappy. And lo! they had come virtually hand in hand, Gail as riotously gay as she had before been miserable. And she

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was unashamedly in love with George, who—and this was the heart of the puzzle—was now as niggardly about showing his affection as Gail was lavish. Yet Gail's light-heartedness seemed too real for acting. And Vance was blissful—a sure barometer that he believed all was well between his idolized parents; and Vance was not easy to deceive as to that.

"What is it, Kate? Come, let's have it now and be through."

Mrs. Lorme hesitated, then asked bluntly:

"Why is George so cold now that you are—uh——"

"Idiotically in love with him? The why I can't tell. But it's all right. He loves me, and I—oh, Kate! I'm mad with my love for him; quite, quite mad."

Again Mrs. Lorme looked at her closely, trying to penetrate through the mystery that she could not but feel hovered near, an indefinable, intangible, but very real menace. Why should a wife talk about her love for her husband as madness, and in the tone Gail used?

"There's something wrong," she pronounced. "Why does George look so anxious if all is as it should be? There's a look in his eyes at times when they rest on you as though his heart is almost too heavy for him to carry."

Gail laughed gayly, but the keen eyes watching saw a slight shiver shake her.

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"Kate, it's all right. It is; it is! He loves me and I love him, and nothing else counts. Nothing! Nothing!"

"That's crazy talk," said Mrs. Lorme, not because she particularly believed what she said, but to give vent to her perturbed feelings.

"Well, I'm crazy, crazy with joy. He loves me and he's with me. I can see him each day and look into his eyes and read his love there. Words? Words make no difference to him and me! He is mine, all mine! A miracle gave him to me, and no one, no one ever, shall take him away."

The elder woman's face softened, grew very tender. She remembered the years of neglect and loneliness through which the young wife had passed, torturing years when her husband had been any one's but hers. George had been a tremendous villain notwithstanding his present manliness and charm. She leaned over and kissed the girl's cheek.

"I keep forgetting what a wastrel George was and how strange it must seem to you to have him decent. You deserve your happiness in your own way."

"My happiness in my own way," repeated Gail. "It is my due for all that I have suffered, surely, surely it is, Kate! But he has never been anything but good and honorable. I can't let you say it even —even——"

Mrs. Lorme laughed indulgently.

"Two George Orcutts in one make it rather puz-

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zling, Gail. But I'm glad you can feel that way about it. He—— Ah!"

The man under discussion had suddenly appeared. Mrs. Lorme saw their glances meet—a youth's and a maid's, or so it seemed, so shy, so adoring, so virginally glad! Swiftly she moved away, embarrassed strangely by what she had witnessed. Yet she did not go so quickly but that she saw the man's love go under cover, a calmly courteous gaze replace the eyes' impassioned tenderness. She smiled maternally. They were but two children, making a mystery of their passion to add to its glamour. She laughed to think that she had taken them so seriously.

Edgerton had neither been aware of Mrs. Lorme's presence, nor its kindly removal; all his attention was fixed on the girlish face smiling so delightedly upon him.

"Will you walk down to the beach?" he asked. "You had better take a wrap; the air is cold near the water."

"I like the cold air."

"I shall get you a wrap. Your dress is thin; we may be some time—I want to talk to you at length."

She flashed a mirthful glance at him as he returned with a big automobile coat.

"Why not a buffalo robe and foot-warmers?" she cried, springing lightly to her feet and giving a quick shake to her lingerie frock.

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"Perhaps you'll wish I had," returned he, with forced humor.

Her answering laugh was wholly carefree. Had she not seen the revelation of his eyes? What was there to fear while he could not come upon her unexpectedly without his eyes betraying him to the world? There was a song in her heart. She walked lightly beside him, chattering in blithe indifference to his constrained demeanor. There was a rosy glow over her of happiness and sheer joy in living.

From the villa a slight natural rise of earth and stubby vegetation ran horizontally to the edge of the sea, ending in a declivity with cosy back-rests along the shore. To the household "the beach" meant this sheltered spot. Thither Edgerton bent his steps, almost in silence till they were seated. Even then he gazed a little while at the foam-crested breakers. Abruptly he turned.

"I am leaving to-morrow, Gail. And for good."

There was a short pause while she gazed at him in a dazed questioning.

"You are leaving Everglades—the South?"

"You," he said simply.

She caught her breath.

"Why?"

"You know why."

"But I don't. You and I——"

"O, we love each other," said he roughly.

"Where are—you—going?"

"To Underwood's for a few weeks; then abroad,

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I think. The Doctor has been planning a vacation for some time, and he'll go with me, there or somewhere."

"You think you'll—forget me?"

"No; I don't think anything so idiotic. I shall think of you and love you till time without end. But with a thousand miles between us I shan't be constantly beset to take you in my arms. Here the temptation is beyond my resistance, now——"

"That you know I want to be there," she whispered quickly. Then: "Have you thought about me—about my loneliness?"

"Yes; but there's no way round it."

"There—is—a—way——"

He gripped his hands till the muscles stood out.

"That's the hellish part of it."

"But Keith——"

"There is no 'but,' Gail. *None!*" He flung out the words with the savagery of despair. "To serve you I can take George Orcutt's name and child—but I can't take his wife."

She caught his arm with both hands.

"But you must if she insists on coming to you.... And I do insist," she sobbed. "You do not belong to any one else. You are Vance's and mine. I have been preparing myself for this.... It is not easy.... Even though it is you.... But—but—to be separated half the time from Vance——"

"Rob you of the boy! *I?* What are you talking about? Vance is not my son—now."

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"But you're *his* father. Don't you see! And he would go to you of himself.... He wants his father and mother united—— He talks it till I feel I shall scream out in madness some time.... *You* are his father—in all that means a father.... We would not wrong any one in doing this for him .... George wanted me to have my liberty that day —he spoke of—this. And—and even if it's wrong, I am willing to pay—— Can't you be?"

She was openly pleading. She felt that she had put him in a position where he could not ask for her favor. And in a position where she *owed* him herself. She had reasoned it out during the days by Vance's bedside after the operation and in the weeks since coming here. Wholly outside of her desire for his presence was his claim upon her own. She had forced George Orcutt's name and responsibilities upon him. He was not free to marry. He would never be. The only wife he could hope for was herself. And she must not only give him a satisfying home and family life, but give it readily.

Doctor Underwood was the only one who knew their secret. And he would keep it always, for Keith's sake. George Orcutt was now a hopeless paretic. He could not betray himself nor her. Keith had no near relatives; nor had she. There was only Vance—and this would mean his happiness now and for all his life. She should have no fear of his future with Keith Edgerton to bring him up.

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Edgerton looked full at her.

"You say you are willing to pay. But just how much are you willing to pay? Are you willing that our children should be——"

His arm shook under the spasmodic trembling of her hands.

"Our—children!"

"Yes; *our* children, *yours* and *mine*.... Have you thought of our children, Gail?"

"Yes," she answered in a dead voice. "I thought of them, but——"

"Joyfully," he completed. "I know. And you have seen nothing but holiness in our union. You have started on the premise that Vance must be saved from knowing his father's full guilt. I wish that Vance might be kept in ignorance of his father's life always. And I want you, till *I* am willing to embrace damnation to get you. If it were just myself, there would be no question of what I should pay. Honor and right are meaningless, except relatively. But our children would unlawfully share Vance's material inheritance. And while thinking themselves of honest parentage, would be legal bastards."

"Keith!"

"The truth isn't always pretty," returned he.

"We're so young—— And to be separated till—death—takes—him—— And it never will!" she sobbed wildly.

"No; there's little hope there."

"Where is there—hope, Keith?" she sobbed.

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"Nowhere for us, dear," said he gently.

She shook the tears from her lashes and looked at him in a wondering way. Deliberately he was going to leave her—and with no hope of their reunion! She might accept this. But to invite their separation! To consummate it upon his own initiative! How could he if——

She voiced her thought:

"Do you—love me?"

Edgerton turned bloodshot eyes upon her.

"Love you! Love you! Am I not leaving you!"

His voice was harsh, the harshness of a man in dire pain. He caught her by the shoulders.

"You are going to try to beat down my resistance. And you will do this in all purity. You think you have a reason that can deify sin. You haven't used the word sin. You've called it 'compensation,' 'reparation,' 'justice,' 'our right.' I don't question your goodness and moral rectitude. No! But your logic's wrong. It's not by chance that we say 'up to heaven' and 'down to hell.' It's ascent or descent. We don't stand still. We *go.*"

His hands left her shoulders and came to her cheeks. He held them and gazed earnestly at the tearful face.

"I want you so much that I'm almost willing to love you in the way that's open to us. If you weren't deceived as to where we should be going I fear I might."

"How am I deceived?"

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"You think we should be ascending. You want to keep me so as to give Vance a worthy father. But a man who lives under another man's name—with another man's wife—passing off both to the world as his own!—his illegitimate children parading under the name of the man he feloniously succeeded—— Is this the sort of man you want to bring up your son?"

"Don't! Don't! You—you—are—not——"

"Not as vile as that—— No! Not in cold blood. Not while I can think and reason.... But with you near me every day—and some day my arms holding you despite myself! My God! Don't you see!"

His voice grew desperate.

"Gail, give me my freedom! Let me have my own name and go away where I shan't be on this dangerous footing with you. For your own sake! For the boy's!—before we all go under together."

She gazed at him in a stupor of pain. And she saw but one thing—the utter bareness of the future without him. To Gail, at this moment, it was not a choice between this good and that good: it was a choice between life and annihilation. It was no use to talk about what might be some day and to presage disaster for to-morrow—when the alternative was death to-day! Nothing could be as havocing as to lose him. Morality and immorality held no meaning. Till his coming she had not realized the poverty of her life. She had not known that she was

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almost blind to the richness of the universe. She had been starving in a land of exquisite plenty. And just now life had begun to open to her its ravishments.

And the door was to close! It was not only the woman who wanted a man's arms to shield her; it was a stunted spirit demanding growth. To the drowning there is no question of whether or not the rescuer will be sucked under: there is only a grim holding on.

To give Keith Edgerton his name did not mean to her now the reopening of the Orcutt-Emmet murder case; nor scandal; nor shame; nor branding Vance with his father's guilt. It meant that Keith Edgerton would go out of her life. It meant emptiness. It meant desolation forever.

"I can't do it," she uttered in a tone of deadly calm. "I never can. You are mine and Vance's. You belong to us.... I shall not give you up—ever.... If you should go——"

"I *am* going," said he. "I shall remain George Orcutt till you release me. I shall never ask you again for my name. When you are ready——"

"——I never shall be——"

"——You can give it to me. I shall visit with Vance to-night and go early in the morning.... This is our good-by."

He looked at her steadily, his face wet with unashamed tears.

"No!" He caught her outstretched hands and

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put them from him. "I haven't the strength to kiss you." He rose. "Wait here; I'll send Vance to you."

She watched him walk up the path. Her eyes held a frozen look. He had had the strength *not* to kiss her.

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XXXV

"I WANT Papa."

Vance said it stubbornly. He lay in bed, a tray of untasted food beside him. It was five days after Edgerton left.

"I think I heard Papa tell you to be good to Mama," said his mother. "To make yourself ill and cause me so much worry—this isn't obeying Papa."

"I don't care. I didn't know he was going when I promised that. You knew. And you let him go."

The child was bitter. He felt deceived, outraged. He had had a wonderful evening with his father, and had been allowed to sit up an hour past his usual bedtime. He had gone to bed feeling very big and manly. And the next morning he found that his father had gone away without letting him know. It was another mystery, and he was tired of mysteries. He cried himself into a fever. The following morning he did not get up. His mother found him with hot tear-stained face hid against his pillow. He refused to be coaxed or shamed into submission.

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"I want Papa," was his cry.

A doctor had been called. Vance shut his lips against the medicine prescribed, and spat out the dose forced between his teeth. Nor would he eat. He did not know the strategic value of a hunger strike; he refused food because they wanted him to eat, and he was not going to do anything that any one wanted him to. It was complete rebellion.

In the doctor's opinion it was a case of a "spoilt child." He smiled skeptically at the mother's explanation that Vance had never been so disobedient before. But Mrs. Lorme, whom he knew well, convinced him that the boy's behavior was really unusual. The doctor began to look serious. The child's heart was weak, and he had not wholly recovered the strength spent in his recent illness. He told the mother to send for the father.

"I cannot," she answered.

Vance had heard. He looked at her now with defiant eyes.

"I want Papa." His voice rose shrilly. "You won't tell me why you do things. You just do 'em. Why won't you send for Papa?"

"Because Papa wouldn't want to come," she uttered, her face very white. "I asked him to stay with us. I want him, too. But—— I'm not crying, dear. See? And you must be brave. You're my man now."

"I'm not a man," he sobbed angrily. "I'm a little

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boy. I don't want to be brave. Why did Papa go without saying good-by to me?"

"He wanted to carry away a picture of a happy, smiling boy," his mother answered truthfully. "The story he told you about Captain Intrepid—that was you, dear. He explained that 'intrepid' means——"

Vance put his fingers to his ears and screamed. Intrepid meant all the things that Vance had no intention of being just then. He was a young savage. He wanted his father and was using his only known method of attack to get him.

The doctor came again, and felt the child's pulse, and frowned, and took the mother outside the room for consultation.

"Doctor Unwin will telegraph for Papa," she announced.

"Oh! oh! oh!"

"Perhaps Papa and Doctor Underwood would take you with them—— A sea trip would be beneficial——" Her voice broke over a sob. "How—how would this do?"

The boy's head pressed a little closer to the soft shoulder. He drew in a long breath, luxuriating in the beautiful fragrance that pervaded his mama.

"But then I should want *you.*"

"My baby! My ba——" She stopped. She had promised not to call him baby again. "Forgive Mama."

His lashes lowered.

"I don't mind—now. I—I *like* it when you and

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I are alone. Please, Mama," he whispered, "I want Papa *and* you. Oughtn't—oughtn't a father to stay with his boy?"

She walked to the piazza that opened off Vance's chamber. She thought of George Orcutt, now senseless, now paying the penalty of his sins, but never from the first day a true father. He had celebrated the child's advent with a crowd of roistering companions and had been carried past her door at daybreak in a drunken sleep. Vance was worse than fatherless, then and now, as far as George Orcutt was concerned.

And the other man——

She beat her knuckles together and uttered a poignant "Oh!" She had been doing this for five days. It hung over her—a black, harrowing memory, corroding, consuming.

She had offered him herself!—and the offering had been refused!

Herself!—the which she had valued beyond everything but the child she had borne, and which she had guarded against all the years' besiegements. A neglected wife, young and incomparably lovely, with an infinitude of charm—there had always been some one ready to console her. Every other man she met seemed to be of a mind—that she was necessary to his happiness and worth every cost she might bring him. In her first bitterness against her husband there had been moments of recklessness when she was almost ready to fill his place with

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another. Her baby had saved her. She had fled to him and nestled him to her, knowing that she must keep faith with him.

Her aloofness had given her prestige. Even George Orcutt's perfidy could not bemean a wife who bore it so nobly. Society had placed her in a case and looked upon her as a rare curio. A peculiar adulation was given her. Fine—good—she had been called these so often that she had accepted them without questioning.

Only—was she good? Was she fine? she asked herself now. And she could not find an answer that satisfied her. Surely it was her duty to save Vance from shame and disgrace. It was a mandate that her maternity placed upon her. Yes; but —*he* did not seem to think so.

"Mama," called Vance, fearfully, "please come in and tell me why you say 'oh!' all the time. Do you hurt anywhere? Or are you—afraid of something?"

She came and sat beside him, as childishly in need of sympathy as himself.

"I am trying to find out something about myself," she explained, patiently. "I have been in the shadows so long that the high light of noon blinds me."

"The high light of noon? When it strikes twelve, Mama?"

She did not answer. She was looking past him with discovery in her eyes. The high light of noon

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—it was this light that beat from Keith Edgerton—penetrative, insistent, clear, purging! And—pitiless. But pitiless because its rays were direct: glamour fell away and only the bald outlines of a thing lay revealed.

And when she herself should be stripped before her own eyes—— What should she find? It was a question only as yet. She was uncertain; fumblingly trying to penetrate beyond her actions to her motives. She looked at her boy—and a queer shivering came upon her. Was she serving him the *best* that she could?

She put her hands out gropingly.

"What's the matter, Mama? Can't you see? You act so funny. Please, darling Mama, don't look like that!"

She lay down beside him, a wet cheek to his.

"Mama is trying to see into your future," she sobbed, and it was the uncertain cry of a girl—a very lonely girl. "She wants to give you the best future she can.... And she doesn't know what that—should—be—— Supposing that you and Mama should not have Papa again—ever——"

"But we will—*we will!*" Vance's voice was frantic. "We've *got* to have Papa! *You* can make him stay with us—this spirit of Papa."

"I'm not sure I can make him, dear," she whispered. "And I'm not—sure that—I should—even for you. But—oh! my baby! It is so black without him!"

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XXXVI

"PAPA!"

The boy sat upright in bed, a quivering bundle of ecstasy, his body hiding the figure seated on the other side. But Keith Edgerton's eyes went past the boy. For one brief instant his and Gail's glances met. And each knew that this was what the other had been living for. Everything was blotted out but the splendor of their love.

"Papa!"

Edgerton lifted the boy from his bed and kissed him, then seated himself with the excited child on his knee.

"So this is Captain Intrepid! Instead of taking care of Mama you've brought your Daddy a thousand miles on a jolting train, doubled up like a jack-knife in an upper berth, and with a peck of cinders in each ear. And all because of a spell of temper! What do you think I ought to do to you?"

Vance's face fell. There was a serious cadence in his father's tone. And the humorous twist to his lips was missing. The boy was silent for a little while. Then:

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"You went away and didn't bid me good-by," he reproached.

"So that's the count. All right, Vance. I stand convicted. I tried to shirk my responsibility, and here is the penalty! It's Socratic justice. Well, little mate, here I am. You are going to have your Daddy for two hours. So think quick the very best use you can make of him."

"But you must *stay*." Vance clutched him about the neck. "Mama and I want you *here*. You're *ours*, you know, Papa."

"I wonder." Edgerton's voice held a singular note. He put a hand under the child's chin. "Partner, if you're mine, you're going to obey me. I have something to tell you. But first, I want to know if you are going to do as I say hereafter. This means that when I tell you not to worry Mama, you're not to worry her. It means when I go away I am not to be called back because I have failed to say something that *you* think I should. It means a good boy instead of a bad one. Think carefully, a promise is a thing to be kept. Now, are you going to obey me?"

Vance's babyish face took on a manly look.

"Yes, sir."

"That rings true. Now, your Daddy's through scolding. Do you remember the rambling old red house that was at the turn of the road right below Doctor Underwood's? Sure. Well, that's my house now. Or will be when I go back. I was to

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have signed the deed yesterday. And that house is going to hold—boys! Yes, partner, a whole round dozen of *boys!* And a new batch of boys every month. Do you remember the time you went with me on the East Side and saw——"

"The boys with the nice ragged pants," shrilled Vance.

"Those are the ones."

"They called my white trousers 'ice cream pants,'" the boy added.

"And you've been skeptical of the propriety of white trousers ever since," laughed the man. "The boys'll knock holes in some other of your beliefs—to your mother's horror, I fear. You were searched for germs for a week after that visit, I remember."

"Boys! Oh! And we're to be there, Mama and I! Oh! Oh! Oh!"

"You're to be there, as often as Mama is willing to spare you. But this is to be bachelors' quarters, partner. We will have a man cook and helpers, and a young man to assist me, and the boys and you and I. This is to be a training school for character. Do you know what character is?"

"The spirit inside of us," returned Vance promptly. "And we build it every day, a teeny bit at a time. You told me." He bounded up and down. "When will the boys be there? Can't Mama and I go back with you now? I'm well."

"Now, partner, here's the time for obedience.

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You're to stop here till May," was the answer. "First, because it's the doctor's orders. And, again, the first batch of boys 'll be there the middle of April. And I want to get their measure——"

"For new pants?"

"No; for the size of their present character. I guess by May they'll understand that when I say my boy is to be treated decently, they'll understand that he is. That's one reason I'm exacting obedience now—I can't have my own boy set a bad example."

"I won't. I'll obey. I will, Papa. How many days is it till May? How old are the boys? Will I eat with 'em? Will——"

Gail half rose. The child was trembling with excitement. Edgerton pinched his lips together.

"No more," he commanded. "Now, I'm going to wrap you in a big fur coat and take you on the shore for a ride. The sea is what you and I need." He looked across at Gail. "And you. Get on your wraps. We have an hour."

It was a soft gray day. The sky and the sea were in a contented mood. The clouds moved leisurely, and the sea touched the shore in a long, quiet roll. The air was refreshingly clear. The automobile sped noiselessly along the hard, smooth beach, now in low tide.

Vance, between the two on the wide back seat, held his mother's hand and leaned against the man's

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shoulder. His world was all rosy again. His eyes rose to his father's—a remorseful look.

"You can tie your ears up, can't you, Papa?"

"What?" Edgerton started from a reverie.

"To keep out the cinders," explained Vance, in shamed voice.

"Oh!" There was a quick laugh from Edgerton, an excited boyish laugh. "I don't believe I shall mind the cinders, Vance. I'll carry a memory of —the sea with me. It's been ten years since I left it." His eyes came to Gail's. "It is ten years?"

"A hundred," she whispered.

Vance sighed happily. He did not object to a nice mystery, a mystery where his mama and papa looked at each other this way.

"Why didn't you tell me about the house and the boys before you left me, Papa?" Which was another way of stating that Vance was sorry for bringing his father on the long, hard journey.

"Why?" Edgerton's voice was whimsical. "I didn't know about them myself, partner. I'm pretty fond of you, you see. And when I was on the train speeding north I found that there was an awful pull on my heart-strings—with the other end reaching back here. And the farther away I got the harder it pulled. Even a makeshift father couldn't go away and leave the boy and the woman he loves to flounder along helplessly. I had to anchor you first. I've always been interested in boys and I've had a lot of ideas buzzing in my head about helping

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some of the handicapped to a better way of living. If I can get a boy to liking outdoor life, the outdoors of the country, I think I can find a permanent home for him; and for as many as want it and are willing to work. And a month of clean outdoor living won't hurt those who don't. There'll be boys from eight years old to about fourteen, and among them all we'll try to find a playmate for you—one to live with you all the time. I'll adopt him and leave him with you, my other boy, while I'm away. And we'll find an active young man who can teach you boys and coach you in games and make good citizens out of you. If Mama agrees."

Vance turned his face to hers, his eyes like stars. A boy to live with him! A *boy!*

"Mama!" he piped.

"I'll do anything I can that Papa wants me to," she returned, smiling through a film of blissful tears. Everything he did only made it more impossible for her to renounce him. And he did not realize this. Her eyes rested on him in the indulgent way they did on Vance. There had been a pull at his heart-strings that drew him to her—— Would there not always be? Her gaze became inquiring. Did he not know?

There was a crowd at the little station. It looked curiously at George Orcutt, then at Mrs. Orcutt and the child. The New York press had duly chronicled Orcutt's presence North without his wife and son. It had faithfully recorded his hurried

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journey South. And to-morrow it would give a detailed account of his return to the metropolis. The reporters, like the servants, were waiting for the "old Orcutt to break out." Gail and Edgerton, unconscious of the other's thoughts, viewed the curious with a strange humor of their own. If the world but knew the inside of the Orcutt case—what a content then for leaded headlines and gossip!

And this it *would* know—some day, was Edgerton's thought. The thought came to Gail as a question: Would it ever know? Her arms went about Vance, a fierce, protective embrace. She held him thus as the train pulled out.

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XXXVII

ASCENT—descent—ascent—descent——

For six months Gail had heard this. In Florida the waves boomed it at her. As she came North the wheels of the train ground it out.

Her eyes took on a hunted look.

Edgerton met her at the train.

"What have you been doing to yourself?" he questioned. "You've been sick and haven't let me know!"

With her hands in his and the warm protected feeling that his presence always brought, she had believed that there was nothing wrong with her or the world. She laughed blithely.

"I'm only tired."

And for the moment she believed this. She was so glad to see him again that she could only look at him and listen to him and adore him. They gazed at each other like blissful children.

Renounce him! Deliberately separate their lives! The thought was ludicrous with him beside her. She had been harrowing herself over bubbles. Why had he bought a house and planned a perma-

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nent home here if not to be near her? They could live separate lives without closing the door forever upon each other.

She had grown slightly hysterical with relief.

He had accompanied her to the Riverside Drive house and had sat for several hours in the sun-parlor and told her and Vance about the "boys." Vance had been on his knee and she beside him, with much of the while a hand in his. His delight in having them again was too great for him to try to hide it.

She had slept peacefully that night. And for a week she had been excitedly happy. She and Vance had gone to see the "boys," and she had left Vance there. She had laughed gayly over the child's indignation at her solicitude about his dressing and undressing.

"Please don't say such things, Mama; the boys might hear," he pleaded. "*They* can dress themselves." He threw back his head proudly and defiantly. "And *I'll* dress myself."

Edgerton grinned.

"If the boys get ahead of our son they'll have to get up early, all right."

The "our son" came out so naturally that the man did not notice it. He was smiling at the boy, and very paternally.

Gail's heart leapt with ecstasy. He not only accepted the rôle of George Orcutt, but was happy in it. Her life could go on now in peace, with

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Vance's future safe, and always a beautiful friendship between Keith and her. Yet——

Ascent—descent. . . . ascent—descent——

The little ivory clock on Gail's dressing-table began to tick it. In June, the sea at Mamaroneck boomed it forth.

June passed, and July.

The training school for character had become of public interest. The fact that George Orcutt was conducting it made it of deep moment to the New York press. Had the school been unworthy it would have still been featured sensationally. But Morris Underwood's connection with it—the alienist was as boyishly enthusiastic over it as Edgerton—had brought it to the attention of educators and essayists. Articles on Boy Psychology and Character—The Orcutt Experiment—Conservation of Boys—and others of the same sort appeared in the serious magazines. Yet—it was not Underwood, the psychologist, but Edgerton, the man, who was responsible for the success attained.

And Underwood, who had grown very social and friendly with Gail, confided this to her with a little chortle of amusement.

"The personal equation—that's the Davidian sling and pebble. The magazines tell about the system that the Orcutt Boy Farm is run on. System?" He chuckled. "It's all summed up in two words—Keith Edgerton. He gives the boys something that's outside my power, or that of any psychologist, to

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name. I might tell those boys for a year how to live rightly, and plan out just how, by their reflex actions, they should go about the job, and not incite one of them to live rightly. Keith doesn't tell them anything, so to speak, and inside of a week their grimy little souls begin to reach toward the light."

"But why?" Gail questioned. "You surely have an idea why."

Underwood looked at her brooding eyes. It was the haunting question they seemed to be asking these days that had changed his gruffness toward her to a friendly confidence.

"Why?" He mused a moment. "Perhaps the truest reason is that Keith has faith in them. A somewhat doubting hope is the nearest I could come to it. And he's not promulgating a theory; he's living a fact, a fact they can all see—himself. Manliness—every boy wants that; it's his unconscious ideal. In Edgerton a boy sees himself as he should like to be; his virility and force and humor fascinate the boyish mind. I suppose the last thing they would call Keith is good. I'm sure it's the last thing Keith would call himself. And I shouldn't like to face his grin if I called him that. And not being good is helpful. No one follows a preacher. That's where *I* fall down. I *talk*." He chuckled again. "I'd tell the brats what to do and not expect them to do it. Keith doesn't tell them to reform, but he expects it—and somehow he gets it across the line and into their muscles."

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"Muscles?"

"Exactly. The mind has a nasty habit of tucking things away. The preacher's Sunday sermon goes into a little compartment of his parishioner's mind to stay. But when the muscles begin to twitch!—*then* there's something doing."

Gail's hand came up to her throat, herself unconscious of the act. Her fingers touched her articulatory muscles in a singularly questioning way. The alienist's eyes, seemingly directed upon Edgerton and a clutter of boys in the distance, were upon her. He saw her lips quiver, very piteously, and her eyes grow somber.

This was the end of July, three months after her return from the South. Hardly a day of these three months but had found her at the "boy farm." She came to bring Vance or to take him away, or to see how he was. Bryan, the chauffeur, no longer felt it necessary to ask where she wanted to go. And in the three months Edgerton had said nothing about wanting his name and his freedom—nor about not wanting it.

Theirs seemed a tranquil relationship. She had not talked with him alone since the day she came from the South. He had not once been to Mamaroneck. They shook hands placidly when they met, and parted. But it was the tranquillity of fire covered up, not snuffed out. Their eyes said all that their lips did not. And in the light pressure of their hands was the thrill of a thousand kisses. They

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were so deeply in love that merely to be together was rapture.

Morris Underwood looked on curiously. He talked with Gail a great deal these days. Soon he admitted her fascinations. She was so natural and girlish and had such a nimble wit! And there was an adorable grace in her excessive motherliness. The physician liked to affect a headache to watch her eyes widen with sympathy. When with her he accepted Edgerton's peculiar status with matter-of-fact acceptance. He had been rewarded by seeing her grow fearless in his society. But it was not for this he did it. "A man and his woman"—this was a battle in which he had no part.

Edgerton had once taken the ground that, given a man strong enough and a woman who loved enough, he could take her anywhere he would—to the blackest depths or to heights touching the sky. Underwood had cheerfully admitted the blackest depths; only reversing the order—that it was the woman who took the man there. But now he was wondering if Edgerton may not have been right—*was* not right, to-day.

He watched the two. And the silent battle was the most thrilling conflict he had ever witnessed. He forgot that it was a man and a woman who loved each other and who wanted each other more than anything else in the world. He looked at it broadly, viewed it from the eternal standpoint. And he knew that in the mysterious depths of things it was not

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the union of the two that counted, nor their separation—but only that their love should lift them higher than they could have gone without it. It came to him that this was what love was for—that its ultimate purpose was to furnish wings for humanity to rise on. A year before he would have scoffed and sneered at such an opinion. But to-day he was a man who held a deep affection for another—Keith Edgerton was to him a son and the idol of his heart. And this love had crowded out much of the bitterness and cynicism that had accrued there through disappointment and loneliness. His fatherliness extended to the woman that Keith loved. He wanted mightily that Keith should have her; and, despairing that, he wished that she should rise to meet her lover's faith in her.

Her fingers now moving over her white throat and the piteous query of her eyes! He watched her intently. And his scrutiny took in the exquisite loveliness of her—the soft curves and the delicate anatomy and the childish sweetness of the red mouth. There was something curiously appealing in the slim young figure with its indefinable fragrance and pretty apparel. He wanted to lift her up and carry her to Edgerton's strong arms and leave her there.

He growled behind his teeth.

To tell the public all the pitiful tragedy of her blighted wifehood! To drag the gibbering idiot known as George Ormond forth with his flabby hands red with murder!..... George Orcutt, in

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the person of Edgerton, had become a respected man among those who knew him; and this respect was gradually percolating through to the public. Here was a reformed man, with a serious purpose in life —and all the more praiseworthy because he was still possessed of the millions that had helped to his ruin. In Edgerton she had an honorable father for her son.... And for herself a lover! For a woman could always implicate a man irremediably—if she chose.

He looked at her piercingly. She held the key—and upon its turning depended her future and the man's. And—what turn would she give it?

He growled again. It was sentimental, irrational, yet—he found himself wishing for her happiness. He was very tender to her that day and for several days thereafter.

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XXXVIII

BUT suddenly Morris Underwood's manner changed. He grew cold toward Mrs. Orcutt, treated her with a sneering demeanor.

"What is it?" she asked Edgerton wistfully. "Have I done anything to anger him?"

"You've done nothing," he answered. "It's a grouch against things in general."

But Gail saw Edgerton send reprimanding glances at his friend. This defense by her lover seemed only to add to Underwood's belligerence. Gail tried to ignore his unfriendly attitude. But there was a biting scorn in his eyes that caused her own to fall; and the jeering tone of his voice was like a slap on her face.

He was applying the lash. He wanted to drive her into releasing Edgerton. It was thus she divined it.

For four weeks she slept but a few hours each night—a troubled dreaming in the early morning; and this through sheer exhaustion after hours of wakefulness and anguished arguments with herself. She had been pale before. She was ashen now.

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Then one morning an employee of the sanatorium brought her a note:

"My dear Mrs. Orcutt:
"Please be at the sanatorium this afternoon at three o'clock, and promptly. This is important.
"Yours truly,
"Morris Underwood."

Gail read it with a new contraction of the heart. This imperative summons—— Did it have to do with her husband? At Edgerton's solicitation Doctor Underwood had taken charge of the correspondence and financial affairs of "George Ormond." This was at the time Gail went South.

Was he now going to give them back into her hands; place this burden again upon her? Previously, over the signature "Mary Ormond" she had sent drafts and letters to Doctor Manton, the Paris physician under whose care her husband was. But it was a graver risk for her to do this than for Doctor Underwood. She might be too guarded or not enough so. She had always been fearful that Doctor Manton or some one of his associates might visit New York, and, out of courtesy, seek to find "Mrs. Ormond" and tell her personally about her husband. She had had the answers to her letters sent to the general delivery window at the Post Office. To get them had necessitated considerable contriving. She had to take Vance with her as a valid excuse for going herself. The child's whims

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were numerous: to say that "Vance wants to buy some stamps for himself," was a sufficiently good explanation. But she had first to incite Vance to want to buy stamps for himself; then she had to leave him beyond hearing distance while she called for her mail. It was a nerve-racking hour, leaving her faint from the strain.

And it was a relief not to know about the details of her husband's case. Doctor Underwood's crisp "Same as usual" was all that was now told her. He had said nothing for a month. Had he been waiting to perpetrate some cruelty? Three o'clock found her at the sanatorium, sick with dread.

She shrank before the saturnine glance with which he greeted her. She could not keep the hurt tears from her eyes, nor her lips from trembling. He led her into his study and behind a screen.

"I want you to sit here quietly for the next ten minutes or so. This mirror gives a view of the room. I want you to hear and see without being seen."

"Wait! Does—Keith know about this?"

"No," he growled.

"Then it's something—unkind, and I won't——"

"You'll sit right here, just as I tell you," he commanded.

There was a jingling of the doorbell. The physician walked away and left her. She sat down facing the mirror, looking into it with eyes almost too

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terrified to see, eyes waiting to behold—George Orcutt.

The alienist returned to the room. With him was a girl. The long mirror revealed her entire figure. She was tall and girlishly plump, with athletic shoulders and hips. She wore a blue suit and hat, a red wing and necktie giving a saucy touch. Her hair was brown and crinkly, her eyes brown with a laugh in them, and there was a deep dimple in her right cheek. She seated herself in the chair the host indicated.

"Yes, I'm Janet Manners," said she. "And I've come to see Keith Edgerton." She looked at him daringly. "And I'm going to stay here till I do see him, or you tell me where I can find him. It's no use to say Keith won't see folks. He'll see *me.*"

"Why?"

The dimple worked mischievously. She pouted—the pout of a girl used to having her way with masculinity.

"Blind—blind—blind!" she uttered commiseratingly, and watched to see the effect of her audacity.

Morris Underwood laughed, a big, hearty outburst.

"Old and in my dotage," he added. "But nevertheless I believe I—have—a glimmering—of—*why.*"

"Now that I have drawn your attention to it," said Miss Manners, dimpling some more, "you may

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even be convinced that it is a deprivation for Keith not to see me."

He inclined his head, in merry acquiescence.

"I am, Miss Manners. I am! And if I could, I should take you to Keith this minute. But——"

"Doctor Underwood, I will not be put off with excuses," she interrupted, raising a finger in warning. And though she dimpled, she was very serious. "Dad's easy. 'We must abide by Doctor Underwood's decision,' he says. And *he* may. But I shan't. I'm more to Keith than he is or anybody else. Edgerton was to have been my name hadn't——" She pressed her lips till they whitened under the compression. Her hands reached toward him, imploringly. "If Keith is sick, I should take care of him. We live on the next ranch; and my two brothers and I played with the Edgertons from babyhood. They're all—gone, but Keith. And I want Keith. I don't care how wrong his head is, or how terribly afflicted he may be. He would never be a burden to me—nor to Dad."

"You love him?"

"I adore him! We all do!"

Doctor Underwood was silent for a while.

"How long do you expect to be in New York?" he questioned.

"Four days. Then I sail for England with some neighbors of ours. I want to see Keith before I sail. I want him to go home with me when I come back, or go abroad with us now if he's well enough. Or I

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shall stay here. I don't care which it is. All I want is to have Keith again."

Morris Underwood rose.

"You will hear from me in two days. I make no promises. I think I may arrange for you to see Keith before you sail. But if not, you as well as your father must submit to my decision. You will defeat your own ends otherwise. I'm acting as Mr. Edgerton's physician. Everything I do is for his best good. My first duty is to him. Be patient now. It will all come out right."

She stood up and looked at him, searchingly, then held out her hand.

"I'm not a patient person. I was sick in bed for the first four months, or I should have come on then and searched for Keith myself. It's only within the past month that I've been able to travel." Her other hand covered his. "Won't you tell me something more than this?" she pleaded.

"In two days," was the answer.

There was finality in his tone, but his voice was very friendly. He went outside and put her into the waiting taxicab, presented her with a handful of roses gathered from a trellised rambler beside the steps.

The smile left his face as he returned to the study.

Gail stood in the center of the room, head high poised.

"It's not true. Keith has never given her any

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cause to make her think he would marry her! And you know this—— You *know* this! And yet you bring me here to try to kill my faith in his honesty. You have planned this scene thinking to make me remorseful. Remorseful? Why should I be remorseful over hurting a man who would break faith with a woman? It's because he's not dead to shame and dishonor that has awakened me to——"

"The holiness of truth," completed Morris Underwood softly.

"Stop!" she commanded passionately. "It's profanation for you to talk about holiness. You claim to love Keith—and then you try to blacken my mind against him when you know that——"

"He cares more for your little finger than all the rest of the world together," again interrupted the man. "Just a minute. I did not plan this scene. I've been in desultory correspondence with Doctor Manners ever since learning who Edgerton is. I had a letter from him last week stating that his daughter was coming to New York and would want to see me. I had no way of knowing what she would say. I've not mentioned the subject to Edgerton and know nothing of his side of it. My only premeditated move was to bring you here to——"

"Try to take away all the sweetness out of my life!—to leave me not only alone, but without faith and trust in humanity!" Her clenched hands pressed against her bosom to quell the tumult that shook her. "But you shall not! You *shall not!* I

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can't go on unless I believe in him! My life has been given over to expediency—I thought I was good, and all the while.... Then—I began to see and—I've—been trying to—get the—courage." Her hands came to her twitching lips, trying vainly to beat back the wild sobs. "To me abstract truth has no meaning—— It had to be embodied for me to see it—— Keith means truth! and light! and —my salvation! And you know this—and yet you——"

"I? What have I to do with it? You haven't lost your faith in your lover." It was a statement, but there was a flicker of questioning in the undertone.

She stepped toward him, and her burning eyes held his.

"No! And he is my lover! He is not hers and never was! Never!"

"And never shall be if you can help it—so?" said Morris Underwood. "And you can, Mrs. Orcutt. What Miss Manners and I want has no bearing on the case. Whether Keith continues in slavery to a married woman or goes free to live the independent life a man should, is wholly up to you. All this light and truth and wonderfulness is in the hollow of your hand. No one can lose it for you but yourself."

She continued to look at him, her eyes searching his.

"This is what you call applying the 'surgeon's

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knife'," said she, in low voice, her excitement gone from her. "I see."

Her hands came together on her breast again, she stood for a fraction of a second longer gazing at him, then with a wild flinging out of her arms, she turned and left the room.

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XXXIX

YOU telephoned for me to come to Mamaroneck at once to see you—— Which means that you have something unusual to tell me. And you don't tell it!"

In Edgerton's manner was restrained excitement. To see her was always an event that sent his blood quickening. But he had been looking rather tired of late; and even her presence had brought little of the exuberance that seemed to belong to him. To-day his excessive buoyancy was in marked contrast to his recent depression. It was as though his spirit was rioting to shout forth a hosanna, and was held in check by a mighty effort.

Gail was blind to his inward commotion.

"Let's go to the summer house," she said in answer. "Here the servants are constantly going and coming."

"Ah! a secret! One of those hideous secrets that Vance detests."

He delivered a message from Vance and told her some trifling news of the "boys" as they walked across the lawn. She made no response. She let

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him fix a cushion at her back and place a hassock under her feet. Still she remained silent. He sat down in a chair facing her and folded his arms.

"Your brother—who was killed—was going to marry Miss Janet Manners."

The man started.

"So you figured it out for yourself! Underwood told me about it this morning. He didn't mean it the way you thought, dear."

She looked at him directly now, noting his flush of excitement. He hadn't called her "dear" since that day in Florida. Nor looked at her in this possessive way since he had known she was not his wife.

"What is it?" she cried out.

"Let's hear what you have to say first," he returned.

She twisted her hands together, then one rose and travelled over the muscles of her throat. There was no contraction now.

"Doctor Underwood meant to drive me into giving you up, and he didn't care how he did it! He knew it was your brother who was engaged to Miss Manners?"

"Yes; he told me just now that Doctor Manners had written him not to mention Harold's name to Janet; so he inferred from that that she wouldn't speak of it herself. Everything turned out as he had deduced—except you! He says he'll never tackle a 'love case' again. I hope not, the old blunderer!"

"Perhaps not a blunderer altogether," said she

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faintly. "For he has gained you your freedom now, and I think it would have been months yet before I could have risen to it but for the way he talked and —and looked at me—as though I were—— But I've been trying so hard—— And I should have, even if—— And you know it, don't you!"

"Yes; and so does he. But he had a reason for wanting you to do it now."

"He wants you to go abroad with—Miss Manners—— He thinks you will—— And I want you to—— If not her—then some one——"

"You don't want anything of the kind," said he, smiling. "You have an idea that you ought to want it, that's all. Do you think I could ever marry any one else—knowing that your heart still holds me! Aside from constancy for love's sake, do you think I could *hurt* you that way?"

Yet—— He was hurting her now! His buoyancy, the exultant ring in his voice—— It could only mean joy in the thought of his freedom. And this, knowing that he was not to see her after they parted!....

But she was suffering so much in this hour that a little more suffering rather than less hardly counted .... She had nerved herself to go through with it.... And she should—bravely.

"I want you to get Doctor Underwood to tell the—reporters. He says that they always report him accurately if he demands it. I want that people should not—misunderstand about—you and—me—

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I shall take Vance and go away till the sensation of the news is over. Then——"

"What?"

"I haven't planned anything definite.... Everything's so black that I can't see anything clearly.... Yet I know——"

"That you will!" His voice rang out triumphantly. "You brave girl! And not 'brigand' bravery now, as Underwood called your carrying me off and foisting me on the law as George Orcutt. To have had the courage for that!—— And the grit to bring me into your home!—— And"—his lips curved humorously—"the strength to fight me after you got me there!" His hands caught hers. "Beloved, do you know what a wonderful woman you are going to be!"

She withdrew her hands and shrank back to her chair. Morris Underwood's avowed cruelty had not hurt her as did this praise. Already, she had a feeling of separation from him, as though she, as a woman, had been put outside his life. He was interested in her now as a phenomenon!

She felt deathly sick. She wanted to end it now, quickly, and crawl off somewhere alone. She raised her eyes—there was one thing more to do.

"Will you try to make Vance understand? He will ask for you a thousand times a day. That will be the crucifying agony—to hear him plead and to know that I can do nothing!.... And now—good-by.... I can't bear—anything—more...."

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"Good-by?" He laughed boyishly. "Dear, there isn't going to be any good-by, ever! That's why I'm sitting here grinning so heartlessly. Underwood seemed to know what you wanted, and he made me promise to let you go through with it. He said it would make you happier. And to make my blessed girl happy is the most important thing in life for me now." He regained possession of her hands and his eyes held hers. She was staring at him in a strange way. "Yes!" he laughed blissfully. "You're *mine!* Do you understand? *Mine!* You and I and the boy are going away together. I've engaged passage on the St. Louis for Mr. and *Mrs.* Keith Edgerton! We're going to sail to-day! And I don't think it'll matter to us what news the papers serve to the public to-morrow. Will it?"

He sprang up and drew her to her feet.

"Underwood, the old bat! kept you from me till you had offered me my freedom. He thought I wanted that you should do this. I did—yes! But I knew that you would do it yourself sometime. And what I wanted was *you!* I can't forgive him for this month that I haven't had you. I damned him to the antipodes and back this morning. But—" his lips came to hers—"it doesn't matter now, beloved."

She pushed his lips away. Her voice was terrified.

"You don't mean it! Say you don't mean it!

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You are doing this to make sure that I'm—strong now. Yes! Yes!"

"Gail, don't you understand that——"

Her hand shut off the words on his lips.

"I understand that you love me well enough to leave me, enough to want me to keep faith with myself." She clutched his arm wildly. "I've got to—to reach toward the—stars now. And I can't without my faith in you. You don't mean what you say! No! No!"

"I mean that George Orcutt is dead," said he gently. "He died a month ago. Doctor Underwood kept this knowledge from you and me, wanting that you 'shouldn't be cheated out of your victory.'" His arms closed about her. "And, dear, I believe he was right."

THE END

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